the alternate view of sci-fi

PARSEC

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Fall/Winter 1999-2000
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Space: the Imagination Station's schedule

Crusade's Tracy Scoggins

Earth: Final Conflict's Von Flores Richard Chevolleau

Behind the scenes Total Recall 2070

Profiles: Apollo Smile Joe Quesada Dave Wolverton Forrest J. Ackerman

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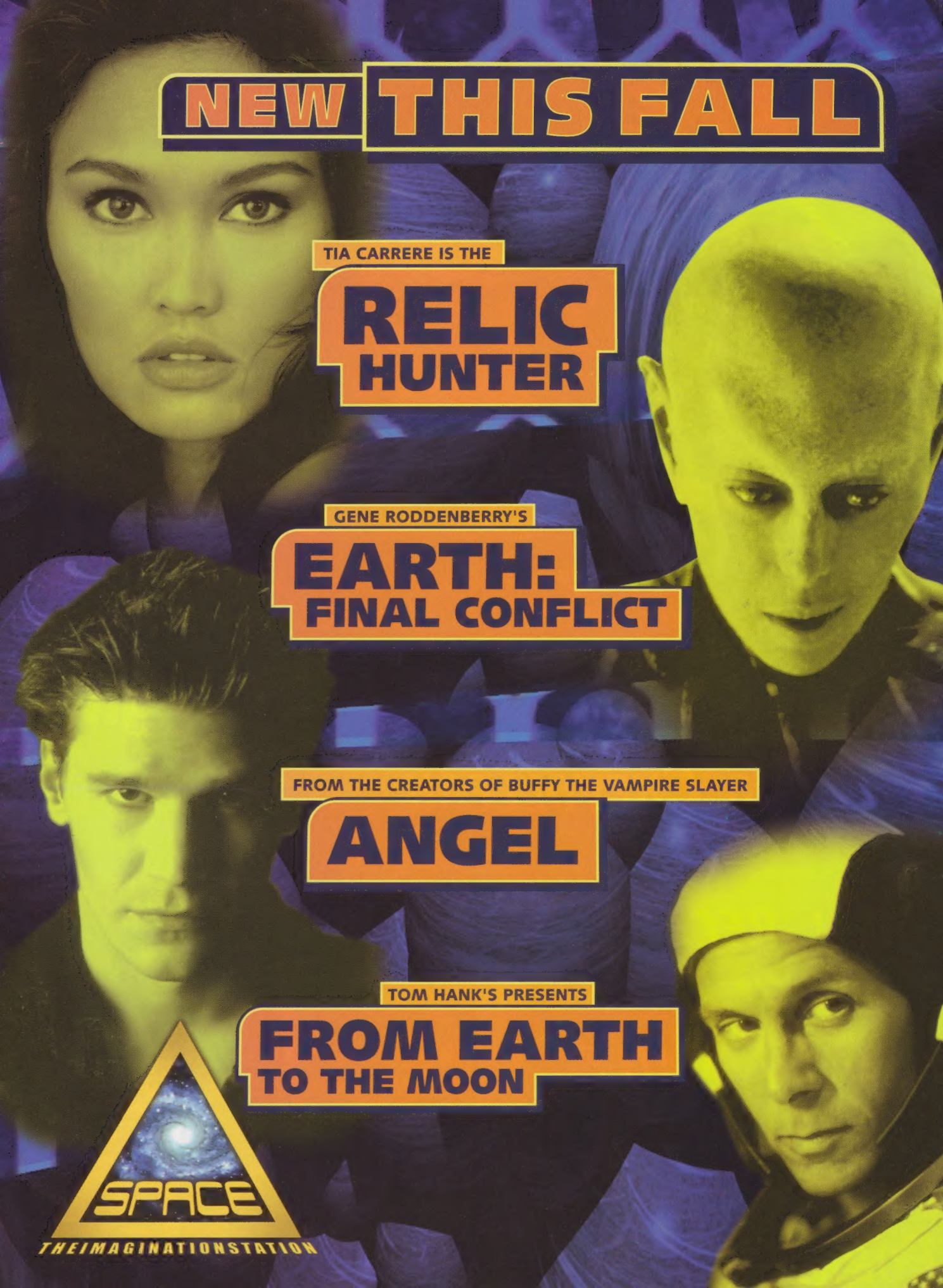
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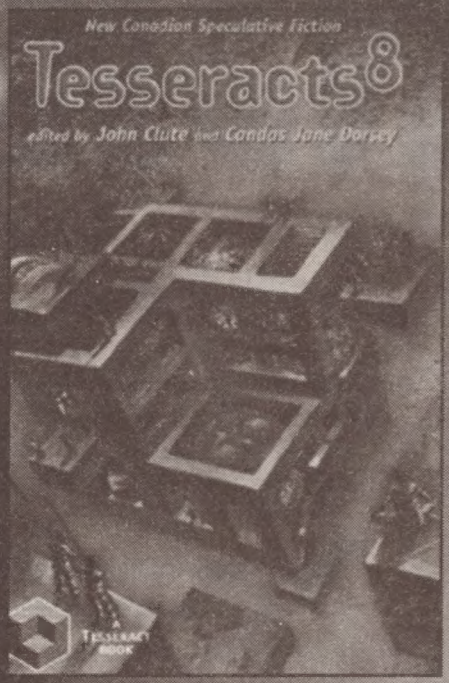

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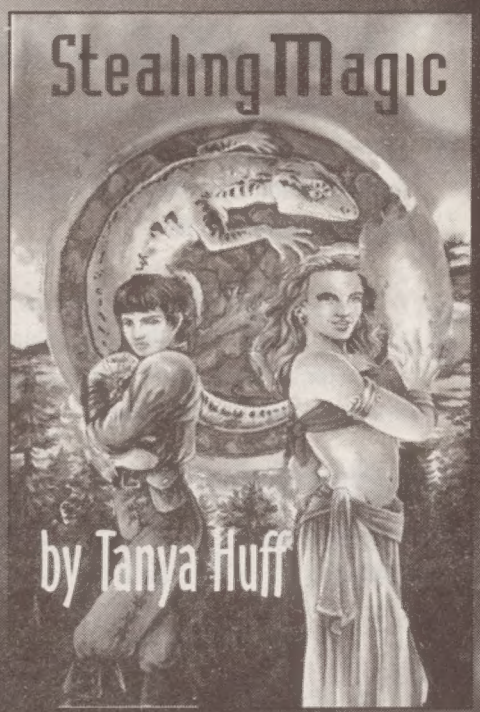

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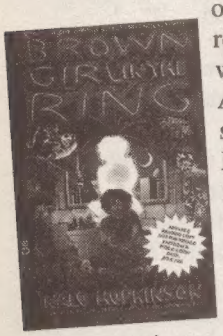
Hopkinson among award winners

Canadian author Nalo Hopkinson of Toronto was among the writers and artists honoured at the Worldcon in Melbourne, Australia, on Sept. 4.

Hopkinson received the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer of 1997 or 1998. She received the award, which is not a Hugo Award and is sponsored by Dell Magazines, for her first novel Girl in the Brown Ring. The novel was the winner of the Warner Aspect First Novel competition.



Her next novel, Midnight Robber, is scheduled for publication next March.

The Hugo Award winners announced at Aussiecon include:

Best Novel of 1998
To Say Nothing of the Dog by Connie Willis

Best Novella of 1998
"Oceanic" by Greg Egan

Best Novelette of 1998
"Taklamakan" by Bruce Sterling

Best Short Story of 1998
"The Very Pulse of the Machine" by Michael Swanwick

Best Related Book of 1998
The Dreams Our Stuff is Made Of by Thomas M. Disch

Best Dramatic Presentation of 1998
The Truman Show (Paramount)

Best Professional Editor of 1998
Gardner Dozois (Asimov's)

Best Professional Artist of 1998
Bob Eggleton

Best Semiprozine of 1998
Locus edited by Charles N. Brown

Best Fanzine of 1998
Ansible edited By Dave Langford

Best Fan Writer of 1998
Dave Langford

Best Fan Artist of 1998
Ian Gunn

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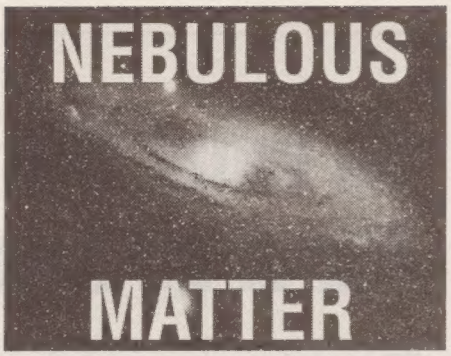
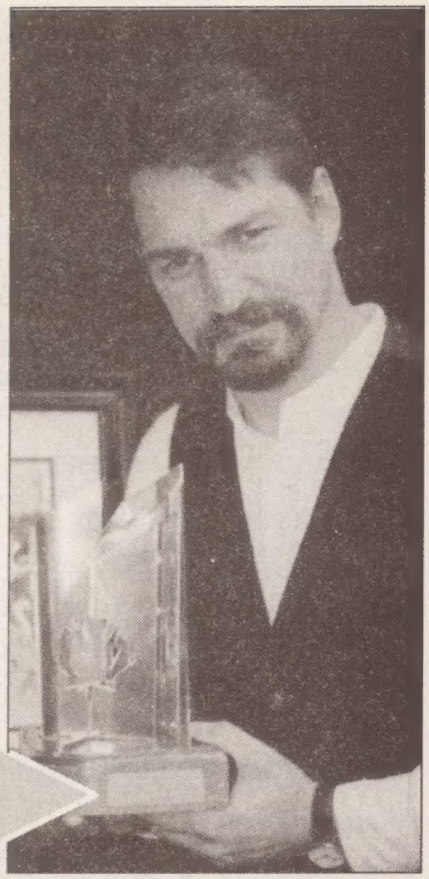


Fans honour Canadian SF

The 19th annual Prix Aurora Awards were presented in Fredericton, N.B. at inCONsequential II on Oct. 16. The

Continued on page 7



Prolific author Edo van Belkom displays his Aurora Award for his short story "Hockey's Night in Canada."

Photo by Roberta DiMaio

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Oh what the hell . . . Auroras need a change

The telephone rang a while back.

It was a friend of mine in Toronto. Usually he calls once every two or three months just to see how things are up here in the Hinterland and discuss National Science Fiction and Fantasy Society business.

After the questions about weather, work and what conventions are on my agenda, he asked me if I was going to write something on the Aurora Awards.

For the uninitiated, the Auroras are Canada's national science fiction and fantasy awards which recognize achievements in literature, media (sometimes) and fan activities. In the past, I've offered some criticism of the award — I've never liked the concept of the "Other" categories — and on the lack of voters. So my friend thought I would be offering some more thoughts on the awards in light of the problems that plagued this year's production.

At the time, I explained that I wouldn't be writing the column from a secure position: I would either be considered a sore loser or a pompous winner. Besides, members of the organizing committee are friends. I had plenty of reasons not to write.

But the seed had been planted.

Indeed, this year's Aurora Award was a debacle:

☆ There have been complaints that the eligibility lists and the nomination forms were late — if some parts of the country received them at all;

☆ One member of the organizing committee was injured in a fall and, as a result, the final ballots were delayed for more than two months. This meant that fans had about five weeks to cast their votes;

☆ The delay also meant that there was only one science fiction convention between the release of the final ballot to the deadline for voting, so only people on mailing lists, with Internet access or at the one convention would be given the opportunity to vote;

☆ And the final votes tally haven't been posted yet. In past years, the tally provided a means to judge the importance of the awards as well as how losers, such as Parsec, fared against the rest of their category (I call this the roadkill factor).

So here we are . . .

What's the answer to the problems facing the awards?

First off, the committee should scrap the system of rotating the award ceremony to different conventions.

In the past few years, the award has been handed out in July and October depending on which convention was the host. This means that some years, fans had an extra two months and others two less months. I suggest Toronto Trek (which has been provisionally granted next year's award) would be the best choice — it's the largest, most-established and most-stable convention.

By having a set convention tied to the award, the way the Hugos do, scheduling for release of lists, ballots and other forms becomes easier. Fans will know when they should receive nomination forms and final ballots.

The size of the organizing committee should be increased. One member says they want some new blood, so it would seem the perfect time to make the expansion. The expansion would also provide the manpower needed to increase the award's presence among fans and reduce the effect cliques within the science fiction community have had on the awards — the turnout is so low, that a nominee can win just by mobilizing a few friends.

What do you think?

Continued from page 5

Aurora Awards honour Canadians in 10 categories.

The winners were:

Best Long-Form Work in English (1997-98)

Darwinia, Robert Charles Wilson

Best Long-Form Work in French (1997-98)

Corps-machines et rêves d'anges, Alain Bergeron

Best Short-Form Work in English (1998)

Hockey's Night in Canada, Edo van Belkom

Best Short-Form Work in French (1998)

La Demoiselle sous la lune, Guy Sirois

Best Work in English - Other (1998)

Arrowdreams: An Anthology of Alternative Canadas, Mark Shainblum & John Dupuis, eds.

Shainblum

Meilleur ouvrage en français

TIE: L'entreprise de Frankenstein", John Dupuis

Jean-Louis Trudel, critiques

Artistic Achievement

Jean-Pierre Normand

Fan Achievement (Fanzine)

Warp, Lynda Pelley, ed. (MonSFFA)

Fan Achievement (Organizational)

Ann Methe (Con*cept 98, Chairwoman)

Fan Achievement (Other)

Janet L. Hetherington (Co-curator, 60 Years of Superman exhibit at Nepean Museum).

Society calls it a day

The National Science Fiction & Fantasy Society is in the process of disbanding.

The decision was made after a sparse turnout at the organization's general meeting last spring and the failure of any members of the board of directors to agree to serve on the society's executive committee.

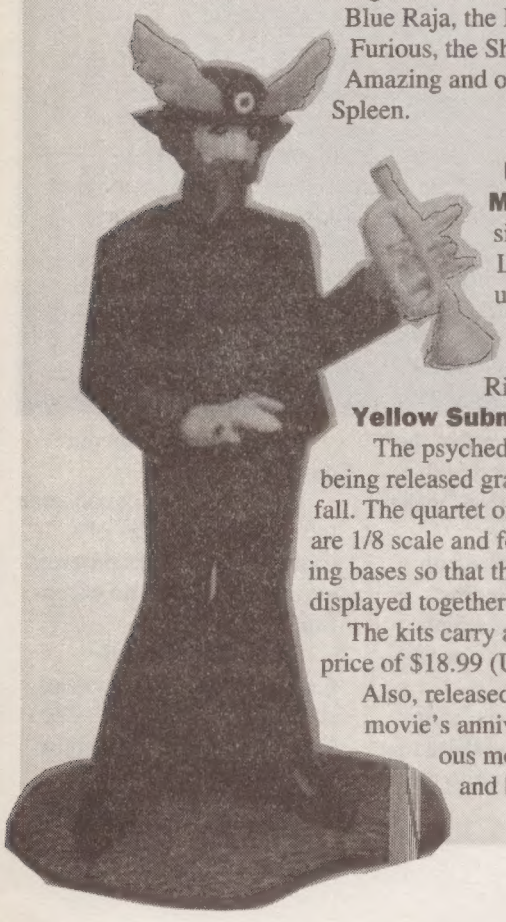
Members of the board have informed the group's membership of the decision and are in the midst of determining how to disperse the funds in the society's bank account.

☆

NEAT STUFF

OK, so you saw **the Mystery Men** in theatres and you don't want to wait until the video is released. What can you do to pay homage to the less-than-super heroes.

Well, **Playing Mantis** has the answer. The company has released a series of eight-inch action figures of the Blue Raja, the Bowler, Mr. Furious, the Shoveler, Captain Amazing and our favourite, the Spleen.



Playing Mantis's subsidiary Polar Lights has unveiled model versions of John, Paul, George and Ringo in their **Yellow Submarine** attire.

The psychedelic models are being released gradually during the fall. The quartet of styrene models are 1/8 scale and feature interlocking bases so that they can be easily displayed together.

The kits carry a suggested retail price of $18.99 (US).

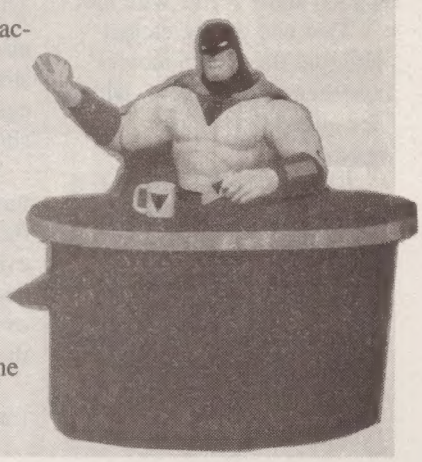
Also, released for the classic movie's anniversary are various models, beanbags and **Dinky** Toy versions of the sub itself.

Betty Page has been undergoing a Renaissance ever since Dave Stevens paid homage to her in the Rocketeer in the '80s.

Now she has been given her own action figure thanks to **Dark Horse** comics.

The figure comes with a leopard and spear, as well as a backing board featuring artwork by Stevens.

Betty carries a suggested retail price of $13.99 (US).



First he was an intergalactic superhero, now he's a talk-show host.

Toycom and the **Art Asylum** have produced a **Space Ghost** action figure. Rather than supply a Phantom Cruiser or even Blip, Space Ghost comes with a mug, desk and cue cards.

Suggested retail price the figure is $19.99 US.

Crusade gives Scoggins an afterlife

Even though the Babylon 5 spin-off spunout, it still gave the actress a chance to explore some new dimensions of Elizabeth Lochley

By
Chris Krejlgaard

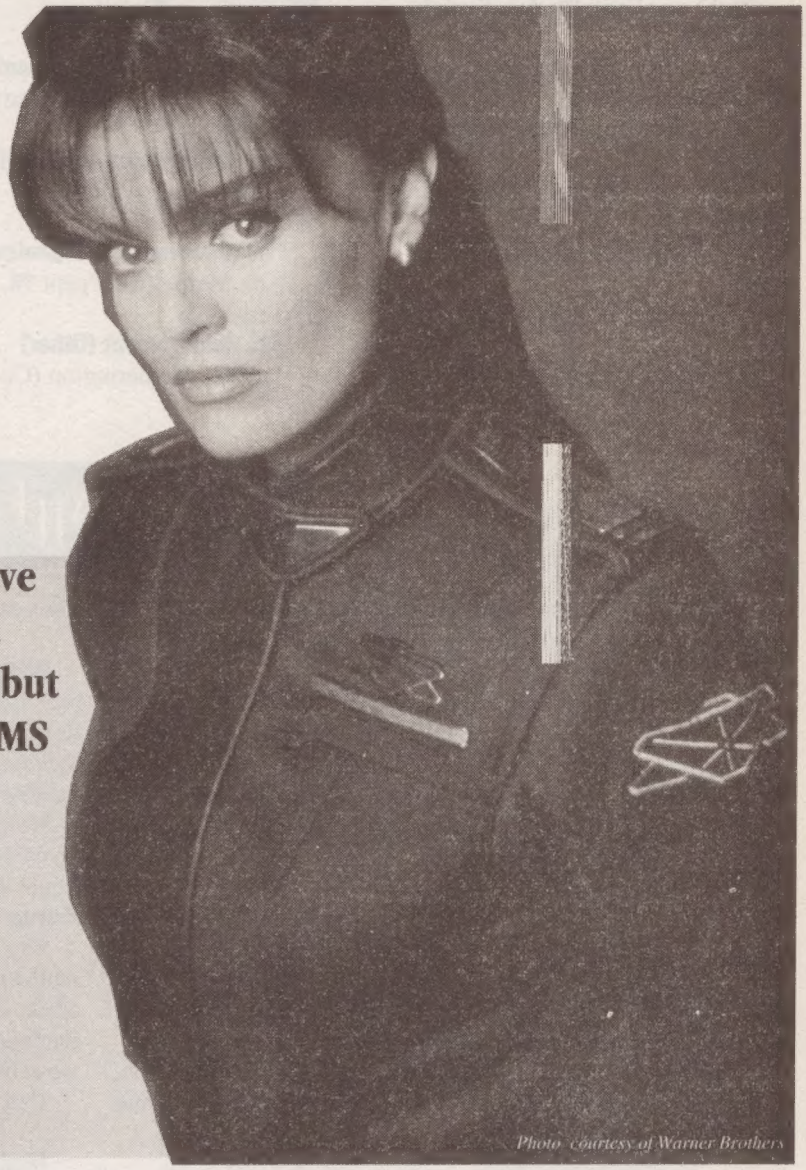


Photo courtesy of Warner Brothers

"We don't have the Iliad and the Odyssey, but we do have JMS (J. Michael Straczynski) and Ray Bradbury."

It was a part Tracy Scoggins wanted so badly that she didn't care it had a brief lifespan.

Scoggins joined the cast of Babylon 5 in its final season. Her character, Captain Elizabeth Lochley, became the space station's commander after John Sheridan became president.

The series' five-year story arc was well known in the industry — so anyone joining the cast for the season was in it for the short haul.

"I was well-aware of the show before I auditioned," Scoggins said. "Normally, I'm pretty easy-come-easy-go when it comes to auditions, but this one I really wanted. I really wanted to do the show.

"I thought that one year on a good show is fine with me."

That one year stretched into two Babylon 5 movies and then to Crusade — which she joined in its sixth episode.

The new series, which fell victim to creative-direction wrangling, focuses on the efforts of a small group of explorers searching for the cure of a plague that threatens to wipe out Earth in five years.

Like Babylon 5, Crusade also involved a five-year story arc — the dispute caused it to fall somewhat short of the goal.

But the new series featured episodes that stand on their own — that is, the events of one episode will not necessarily mesh with the events of an episode later in the series.

Despite the five-year timeframe for telling the story, Scoggins points out that the episodes are imbued with a sense of urgency that "makes it highly watchable."

Even as production on Babylon 5 was winding down, she had some hints Lochley would have an afterlife

"I had been given some indicators here and there that I would be going on to the next project.

"Which made me enormously happy."

It's natural for an audience to see different sides of a character as a series progresses, and Lochley is no exception.

"In the episodes of Crusade I did, you see sides of Lochley that haven't been seen prior to that," Scoggins said.

"My character seems to be

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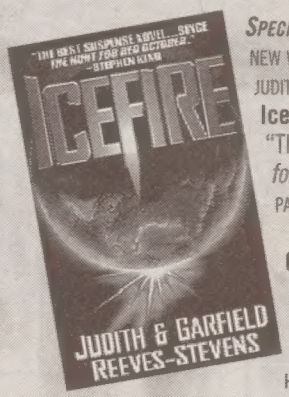

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more involved in this series. I really like the path that Joe has walked her down."

Of course, Scoggins has walked a path through science fiction during recent years.

"Apart from the blatant entertainment value of science fiction, I like the myth and the fantasy of it and the fact that it makes you think," she said.

"It causes you to examine things more closely and it's well-known that its the myth of our generation.

"We don't have the Iliad and the Odyssey, but we do have JMS (J. Michael Straczynski) and Ray Bradbury."

Before joining Babylon 5, Scoggins appeared in such movies as Alien Intruder (1993).,Dollman vs. Demonic Toys (1993) and Demonic Toys (1992).

On television, she played "Cat" Grant on the Adventures of Lois and Clark. She also appeared on The Highlander, as the love interest for the resident poor schlub Antonio on Wings and as a Cardassian scientist on Star Trek: Deep Space 9.

For the long-time Star Trek fan, the role of Gelora Rejahl was a treat. One of the highlights of her time on Babylon 5 was the opportunity to meet actor Walter Koenig.

"I got to meet Chekov," she recalled. "I was always asking him these ridiculous questions and quoting lines from the original Star Trek and he was very good-natured about it."

"In the episodes of Crusade I did, you see sides of Lochley that hadn't been seen prior to that."

☆

New Models

Classic monster series expands

Polar Lights has added to its Universal Monsters Line with the release of the Wolfman kit.

The kit, showing the Lon Chaney character prowling in the dead woods, carries a suggested retail price of $20.99 US.

The company has also released a kit based on The Mummy. The finished 1/8-scale model shows the man in bandages along with his sarcophagus and base. The kit's suggested retail price is $26.99 US.

Size matters

Polar Lights is releasing a nine-inch tall model of the latest rendition of Godzilla.

The $18.99 model comes with a diorama base. It hit stores in October.

The company also plans to release a kit feature Godzilla and her babies in 2000.

Road work

Polar Sounds has addded to its relaunch of the Odd Rod series with Dracula's Dragster.

The 1/10-scale kit, featuring the count in a modified coffin, goes for $20.99 US.

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Recalling succ

Photo courtesy of Alliance Atlantis

Micheal Easton, left, plays David Hume and Karl Pruner plays Ian Farve in the small-screen version of Total Recall.

Following in the footsteps of Schwarzenegger forced the producers of Total Recall 2070 to take some creative steps in order to gain distance from the successful '80s movie

It's a challenge to base atelevision series on a theatrical movie that is closely identified with the actor in the leading role — in this case Arnold Schwarzenegger.

However, in the case of Total Recall 2070, the producers opted to use the movie as a jumping off point.

"We were able to use the franchise of the Total Recall movie and the inspiration of Phillip K. Dick's original story (We Can Remember it For You Wholesale) and the recall technology for the basis of creating our series," explained series' supervising producer and writer Jeff King.

Because of the financial constraints of television, mimicking a $70-million movie was impossible. So King and the rest of the creative forces behind the series opted to make some changes.

In other words, they had to re-invent the franchise.

They brought in a different hero, who King describes as a "thinking action hero" rather than a "pure action hero" and added an android character — played by Karl Pruner, best-known as reporter Dan Watson on the show E.N.G. . The creators also changed the series' timeline because Mars was left as a lush, green planet at the end of the movie.

The creators also introduced the Citizen's Protective Bureau, a global police force that has to track down renegade androids. It also has to

Photo by Michael Gibson, courtesy of Alliance Atlantis

"What we like and kept and think that Dick was intrigued with and we are, is the idea of memory and fixative ideation of personality."

Photo by Alex DuKay

Above, Easton shares a scene with actress Cythnia Preston (Olivia Hume) during a first-season episode. Left, Easton and Pruner on one of the Toronto sets used in the series.

stop the multi-world corporations, like Rekal, a company that specializes in illegal temporal vacations and artificial-intelligence technology.

"Clearly, this put us on a different footing," King said.

What still remains is the idea of memory.

"What we like and kept and think that Dick was intrigued with and we are, is the idea of memory and fixative ideation of personality," King said. "Do you know what you know because of your memories? Do you know what you know instinctively? If you took your memories and put them in someone else, who would that person be? Would that person be you? or you A? or you 1?

"The recall technology has fascinating possibilities in that regard."

King is clearly enthused by the philosophical possibilities the series holds.

"I enjoy the opportunity to do and create things that I haven't seen on television and things that I think will make enjoyable shows," King explained. "And I found in this material a combination of genres . . . a detective thriller and a futuristic noir . . . the opportunity to do a future noir.

"It's a police show with a psychological thriller at its core."

But the mixture of genres with science fiction, according to King, is becoming part and parcel of storytelling as television enters the new millennium.

During his tenure in television, King has told many a story.

He has worked as a producer and writer on such series as Night Heat, E.N.G. and Due South, as well he also served as a writer and co-executive producer on Stargate SG-1.

Indeed, he seems to relish the opportunities working in science fiction presents.

"Working in the future is becoming less the realm of science fiction and more the realm of current 21st century storytelling," he said.

"What we're doing is just trying to extrapolate the most cutting-edge possibilities for things like cloning and biomechanics and the related ethical, legal and moral issues to those things into the world of policing in the 21st century."

The mixture of various genres also helps broaden the audience base for the series.

The name of the series, at least initially, attracts science ficition fans. But the police-thriller aspects will likely draw viewers from a more mainstream audience.

"Increasingly, the lines that used to be a demarcation between traditional sci-fi shows and everything else are becoming increasingly blurred."

☆

Final Conflict's 'BAD GUY'

Real life tragedy helped Von Flores nail the part of Sandoval

by
Chris Krejlgaard

Von Flores fills the essential role of nasty guy on Earth: Final Conflict. It's a function that has been filled since the first episode by Flores' Agent Sandoval.

"Sandoval is almost an automatron. He's completely subservient to the Taelons," Flores says of his character, whom the actor adds is described as "OUR BAD GUY" in the series' bible.

Ironically, Flores didn't think he would win the role after his first audition.

"It was the worst audition I had ever done in my career," Flores recalled. "And I thought, 'Well OK, I didn't get that one'.

"I didn't know it was a Gene Roddenberry project. Obviously, no one knew at the time how big it was going to be, so I just kind of blew it off after the audition."

Two or three months later, Flores was preparing to leave for South Africa to film an episode of Sinbad, when a friend who was serving as production designer on Earth: Final Conflict, contacted him and told Flores there was a part that would be perfect for him.

Arrangements were made for Flores to have an audition for the part — described by the friend as being similar to the character of Rick from Casablanca.

Once there, Flores discovered he was reading for the same part he had so badly auditioned for months earlier.

"I was in a bit of a quandary. I didn't know if I should play it as Rick or as it was written," Flores recalled. "For some reason, I decided to play it as written . . . even though I had messed up so badly the first time."

During the audition, Flores drew from the experience of losing his mother a few months earlier. It was an effective strategy for the particular scene.

Flores' audition was the scene from the second episode, Truth, when Sandoval (who was called

Like an onion, the layers of Ronald Sandoval have been peeled during the first two-plus seasons of Gene Roddenberry's Earth: Final Conflict. But sometimes the character's nuances haven't been to the actor's liking.

Baylis before the production began) was telling Boone that he had Boone's wife killed.

"There's a line where Sandoval says 'you know we're not cut out for love anymore,' and I knew what I wanted to do was to make him into someone who has kept everything in all his life.

"That's how the scene unfolded, with me almost crying and fighting with all my might not to."

"I really felt like I was all over the map. I didn't particularly like some of the performances that I gave."

Flores' conception of the character crystallized with that scene. It was the moment when everything Sandoval stood for was laid on the table for viewers to see. That conception was broadened in the first season episode, Sandoval's Run.

"That was when his humanity came out," Flores said of his favourite episode.

But while he was happy with the way the series' first season unfolded, the same cannot be said for season two.

"The second season was difficult because it felt like there was no direction," Flores said.

"I really felt like I was all over the map. I didn't particularly like some of the performances that I gave.

"But this season, we have four or five new writers and they seem to be on the ball when it comes to writing for the characters."

Photo courtesy of Alliance Atlantis

With a new set of writers for the series' third season, Von Flores says his character will be taken in new directions — something the Toronto-based actor relishes.

Adding to the renewed focus, Flores adds, is the involvement of executive producer David Kirschner in the creative aspect of the series — a role he had reduced for the second season.

Kirschner has said that the coming season will see some of the loose ends from season two tied up, and will see a return to more character-driven storylines.

With the new writers, comes new facets of the character during the third season.

"They're throwing me different things this season and they're telling me about things that are going to happen with the character this season," Flores explained. "I'm going to trust that what they're doing is right for the character and if I feel what they're doing is right by the character, I'll tell them so."

Although, from the "moments" that Flores knows about the upcoming season, he says viewers may find out that Sandoval "is not such a bad guy after all. Maybe his methodology is suspect, but he's not such a bad guy."

☆

Changes mark series' third season

The third season of Gene Roddenberry's Earth: Final Conflict saw a handful of changes in front of the camera. Canadian actress Jayne Heitmeyer joined the cast as Renee Palmer. The character is a cutthroat Resistance fighter who runs the division at Doors International that specializes in joint ventures with the Talons.

The character will help balance Lisa Howard's reduced presence on the series. Howard's pregnancy meant that the involvement of her character of Lili Marquette had to be scaled back.

But behind the camera is where the most drastic changes have occurred.

"We were very proud of what was accomplished in the first season," said executive producer David Kirschner. "But I'm disappointed with what happened during the second season."

In fact, Kirschner accepts some of the blame for last season's lacklustre creative performance — although the series has been renewed for at least two more seasons.

After the first season, Kirschner left to oversee production of the feature film, Bride of Chucky. At the time, he expected that the series' creative forces would build on the first season's success. It didn't happen.

Majel (Roddenberry the series' co-executive producer) wasn't happy with me," Kirschner pointed out. "She was really mad when I went off to do my films."

During the sophomore season, the series' storyline began to take on a longer arc-like form, meaning that viewers who missed one episode could miss essential plot points that would be important later in the season.

Kirschner said this season will "tie up these loose ends" and see more "self-

Series takes actor far from poverty

As Auger, Richard Chevolleau is far removed from his life in a Jamaica ghetto

As an actor, Richard Chevolleau is now able to shun the roles that remind him of the east Toronto neighbourhood where he grew up.

Playing the techno wizard, Auger, on Gene Roddenberry's Earth: Final Conflict, allows him to avoid these roles and not go hungry.

"Being black, I get to play a lot of these roles," Chevolleau explained. "Hoodies . . . with an American accent, and it's limiting to black actors.

"Why can't I play a computer genius, why can't I play Hamlet, why can't I play characters who are traditionally white?

"Auger was one of the first times that I could play a character who wasn't defined by his colour."

The futuristic series is far removed from the poverty of growing up in Kingston, Jamaica, and in Toronto.

Chevolleau spent his first eight years in a Kingston ghetto. There he was forced to share a bed with five siblings, while his parents struggled to make ends meet.

Joining relatives in Canada, didn't ease the pressures on his family. His parents' marriage fell apart and Chevolleau and his brothers and sisters were left without a father figure.

Like others in his circle of friends, Chevolleau ended up in jail — he was never charged with an offence, but he did spend a weekend behind bars.

It was a sobering experience and a turning point in the 17 year old's life.

He transferred schools,

Photo courtesy of Alliance Atlantis

contained" episodes.

The writers also began tinkering with the characters and took them in directions which Kirschner said wasn't intended during the series development.

Earlier this year, Von Flores explained he was unhappy with the direction his character (Sandoval) had taken in the second season.

His concern was shared by the series' producers Even though the series remains high in the ratings — for a syndicated series — and it was renewed for another year, producers opted to gut the writing crew and bring in a new team to bring the series back toward its original course.

"We're going to refine the focus of the series," said Kirschner. "We're going to relate more to the human level of the characters and become less about 'spy-fi'."

While Flores' character will be refocused, the major undertaking will be with the character of Liam Kincaid who is played by Robert Leeshock.

"Originally, he was supposed to be a sort of everyman on the show," Kirschner said of the character who replaced the series chief protagonist William Boone (played by Kevin Kilner) after the first season.

"We made a mistake in the second season by moving away from that aspect of Kincaid."

Kirschner added that Kincaid's shadowy relationship — alluded to during the episode, Thick as Blood — with Sandoval will be fleshed out more as the season progresses.

And through all the changes, lies Kirschner's commitment to improving the series and ensuring Gene Roddenberry's vision remains on the small screen.

"In the first year, I gave up my entire salary and that's what I'm doing in the third year, as well," Kirschner explained. "Just to put it back into special effects and the things we need.

"I really believe that strongly in the show."

— Chris Krejlgaard

Photo courtesy of Alliance Atlantis

It took a stint behind bars — just a weekend and no charges were ever laid — to turn a 17-year-old Richard Chevolleau into a dedicated student and, eventually, a popular and much in-demand actor.

applied himself to his school work and held down a couple of jobs. Thinking it was a chance for some easy credits, Chevolleau enrolled in a drama class. He's been on stage or in front of a camera ever since.

Before landing the role as Auger, Chevolleau took on parts ranging from gang member to cops.

He's had landed parts in such television series as Friday: The 13th, E.N.G., Tek War, Matt Waters and New York Undercover. He 's also appeared in such movies as The Wrong Guy and The Wall (not the Pink Floyd one).

Most recently, he took on the role as a police officer who helps Dean Cain find his brother's killer in the feature film, The Unconcerned.

"He's a married guy, a good guy and that's how he's described in the script," Chevolleau said. "It's an opportunity to play a cop rather than 'a black cop'."

Chevolleau welcomed the chance since it is far from the stereotypical black characters that have been offered to him.

"There's nothing wrong with doing a movie about being black and being proud of it. But often times, that's not the case.

"The characters are stereotypical and they don't carry any weight other than to carry a gun. They don't have any redeeming qualities.

"That's just bad writing."

Like Auger, the role of Paul the cop provides an opportunity to shed the stereotype and broaden his acting experience.

"I always wanted to play character roles," explained Chevolleau. "The guy in the wheelchair, the freaky guy and Auger gives me that opportunity.

"It's an opportunity to play something I've never done."

Auger had started out as two separate characters — one character who would have been rarely seen by the audience and the other was Josh, a street kid who knew about Auger.

Chevolleau auditioned for Josh. After the audition, the producers decided that the street kid bit had been done too often on television, so they combined the two characters into Auger.

With two seasons under his belt, Chevolleau is pretty happy with the direction his character has followed on the series.

In the future, Chevolleau would like to see elements of Auger's past revealed and he would like to see the character face challenges from other techno-wizards.

Playing Auger fulfils one dream for the actor. He still has another left to go.

"I'd like to play a superhero.

"It's something that I always wanted to do ever since I was a kid," Chevolleau said. "But for me, it was a pipe dream because I had never seen any black superheroes. I would like to play Batman or see another black actor play Batman. I want to break that mould."

By breaking this mould, Chevolleau hopes he can provide a measure of inspiration to children who are facing the same challenges in life that he faced growing up in the Toronto housing project.

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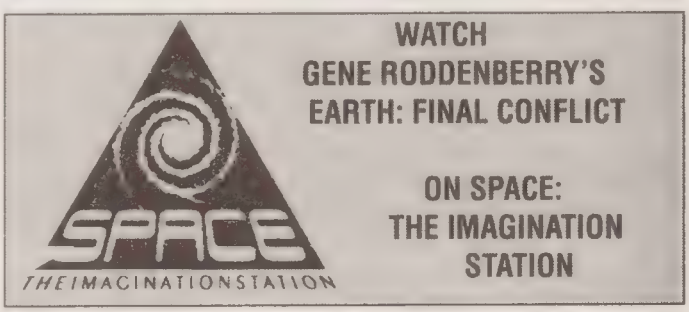


GRAND MASTER OF HORROR

Forrest J. Ackerman and his Famous Monsters of Filmland introduced generations of youngsters to the wonders of horror . . . it's a duty he still gladly fulfils

By Chris Krejlgaard

Photo courtesy of Forrest J. Ackerman

Since he was a youngster, Forrest J. Ackerman — Forry, to some — has been enthralled by horror and science fiction movies, especially those of the '30s, '40s and '50s. The Los Angeles-based archivist spends a good chunk of the year on the road trying to foster the same affection among another generation of movie goers.

With enviable clarity, Forrest J. Ackerman can remember the exact moment of inspiration almost 30 years ago.

Ackerman, who helmed the classic Famous Monsters of Filmland magazine, was on a plane headed for Rio de Janeiro and the World Fantasy Convention. On board with him were such luminaries as authors Philip Jose Farmer and Robert Bloch, as well as actress Yvette Mimeux.

The plane hit turbulence over northern Brazil.

"We were bouncing around and I looked down at the Amazon. I could imagine the piranha leaping from the water waiting for us to crash and they'd have a meal," Ackerman recalled during a stop in Montreal. "And all of sudden it came to me . . . Vampirella."

In the late '60s, Warren Publishing, the company that produced Famous Monsters as well as such cult favorites as Eerie and Creepy, wanted to put out another magazine. Taking a cue from Jane Fonda's Barberella, the magazine was to follow the adventures of a mod witch. (an early name suggested by Ackerman, "Miss Terry," was rejected by the publisher).

A few months later, over the Amazon, Ackerman conceived the character's background — the native of a dying planet where the populace survived by drinking blood. This was because blood flowed like water on the planet.

The witch was about to become a vampire.

Of course, Ackerman survived the plane ride (and the convention) and returned safely to the United States. But coming up with a name and a brief background was just the beginning.

The suggested name had to undergo the full scrutiny of democracy.

"There was a big list of suggested names in the office and people were supposed to vote on the name they liked," Ackerman says. "By the end of the first day, it was evident

that they wanted Vampirella."

After winning the popular vote, publisher James Warren told Ackerman to come up with an origin that would be used in the first issue.

"Since I named her, James Warren said I had to come up with an origin."

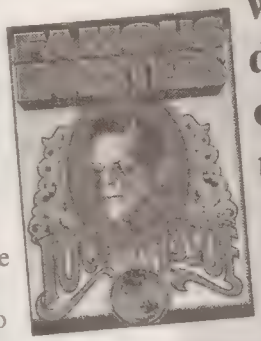
An hour later, Ackerman had scripted the pages that would bring Vampirella to reality.

After a decade-long run, the character was left in publishing limbo when Warren Publishing closed up shop in the early 1980s.

"One day, James Warren just disappeared off the face of the Earth," Ackerman explains, suddenly losing the boyish excitement in his voice. "He just walked away from his life and the whole thing (Warren Publishing) just collapsed.

"It was one of the big mysteries. Then a month ago, I was at a convention in San Diego and this man came up to me and it was James Warren.

"He looks great and he's ready to get back into publishing."



And one of the first orders of business, according to Ackerman, is to take control over Vampirella. The character has been licensed to another publisher and has enjoyed a bit of a renaissance during the last few years. But Ackerman and Warren believe that Vampirella has strayed from her roots.

One day, James Warren just disappeared off the face of the Earth. He just walked away from his life and the whole thing just collapsed.

While Vampirella may had captured the fancy of adolescent fantasies, it was Famous Monsters of Filmland that has given Ackerman his real foundation for fame and provided the basis for what has been affectionately dubbed "Ackermania."

From 1958 to 1981, Ackerman helmed the magazine that chronicled the stories behind some of the classic horror and science fiction movies of the '30s, '40s and '50s.

The magazine was a natural offshoot of his love for these movies — and also allowed him to make use of the thousands of movie stills and posters that he had accumulated over the years.

His 18-room mansion in Los Angeles contains some 300,000 pieces of movie artwork, as well as 50,000 books, pulps and magazines, almost countless movie props such as the robot from Fritz Lang's Metropolis,.and about 1,200 video tapes.

With the realization that immortality may not be in the cards for him, Ackerman has begun to search for a new home for the items; not just any home, but one which would treat them with the reverence due them.

Unfortunately, at the time of the interview, a handful of promising offers had fallen by the wayside.

Until such a home is found, the items will provide a link between contemporary horror and science fiction fans and the movie pioneers such as Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi and Lon Chaney Jr.

Ackerman's friendship with these actors allowed him to offer readers insight into the making of these movie

Continued on page 62

Photo Courtesy of Forrest J. Ackerman

"I'm sure Lugosi and Karloff would have been horrified by modern horror movies, because they were both gentlemen," says Ackerman who shared a number of discussions with the legendary actors.

Apolloism hits sci-fi fandom

Apollo Smile's high-energy show and love of anime captures hearts of convention goers

Photo courtesy of Apollo Smile

Apollo Smile has plans for taking her character into the worlds of comic books, anime and music.

It's called Apolloism.

It's a burst of energy which has captured fans at conventions across North America. And standing (or dancing, fighting or singing) at the maelstrom is Apollo Smile.

Apollo Smile, a singer/song writer from the U.S. East Coast, is the driving force behind Team Smile. (If you're wondering, yes that is her name — Apollo is her middle name and Smile is a stage name she has long used).

And it's one big team. As of early September, the team sported a fan base of more than 12,000 just in the United States. During her convention appearances, it's clear that she appreciates the fans' reaction to her performances and her character.

"Our motto is: Without you, our fans, there is no us," she said during a recent stop in Toronto. "We've been completely independent; self-published, self-financed and self-created, without anyone in the industry taking a partnership with us.

"We have such a hard-core fan base, that the fans have enabled us to keep going."

Thanks to her appearances on Japanese television, on the convention circuit, as well as on the U.S. cable channels the Sci-Fi Channel, Showtime movie channel and as the Hong Kong Cinema Movie Girl on The Movie Channel, the fan base extends beyond the borders.

"It's been very good," she says of fan reaction. "The global experience is starting to spread."

In the process, Smile has also heightened the profile of anime in the U.S.

"It was good to get out there and expose more anime to the North American market," Smile explained of her stint as hostess for Anime Week on the U.S. sci-fi network.

"I got to help write the scripts for it and explain a little more about the animes we were featuring."

Apollo Smile — the business — started about three and a half years ago.

"I had just left L.A. I ended my record contract and moved back to New York City," she recalled. " I met my husband (former fashion photographer Douglas DiMonda) and we decided that we wanted to have a career together."

The result was their production company, Team Smile.

"We decided that it would be a great genre for me to

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perform my music and stage show for a sci-fi fan base."

It also provided an opportunity for Smile to combine three of her loves — dance, song and anime.

Apollo majored in dance and theatre while she attended college. She had aspirations of having a professional career as a contemporary dancer and trained at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre in New York City.

But her big break came as a song writer.

In 1990, Smile's song Let's Rock was selected for use in the movie, Lost Angels.

The sale helped her land a deal with Geffen Records. In 1991, the label released her first solo album, entitled Apollo Smile.

While the album went nowhere, its title track, Thunderbox, was selected by Paramount Pictures for Days of Thunder.

Her album was voted to SPIN magazine's Top 10 Best Albums Of The Year You Didn't Hear in 1991.

But with the end of her contract at Geffen came the beginning of a new part of her performing life.

Besides arranging Smile's stage productions, Team Smile is also breaking new ground with a line-up of CDs, comic books and other merchandise featuring Smile.

"We created everything around me and what I do live," she said.

The comic book series, composed by Team Smile members, artist Peter Kato and writer Paul E. Hosten, as well as Smile herself, was introduced last summer.

During the early part of the fall, team members are also pitching the concept of a

live-action Apollo Smile television program to networks in Los Angeles.

Smile hopes that if the project gets the green light, Team Smile will be able to put together an animation project which would complement the program.

In the meantime, Smile is putting the finishing touches on her third CD, Wrecking Ball, which should hit stores around Christmas.

FAST FACT

APOLLO SMILE'S first album was voted to the 10th spot in SPIN magazine's Top 10 Best Albums Of The Year You Didn't Hear in 1991.

But through all projects, there is one constant theme— anime.

"Anime is what inspires me to do this career," Smile explained. "Anime music, female heroism, sci-fi action/adventure is all part of it."

Comics, cards, anime videos, toys, Pokémon, Dragonball Z, Sailor Moon, Star Wars

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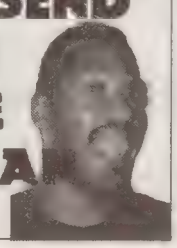
NEXT ISSUE: TOWNSEND ON THE BATMA



ANIME RELEASES

Some selected anime releases scheduled to hit the market during late fall and early winter:

Compiler 2: ADV; Running time 50 minutes; VHS English — dubbed $19.98 (US); Subtitled: $29.95 (US).

Sent from a 2-D world to conquer the Earth, beautiful Domni-Matrixes Compiler and Assembler have instead found co-habitational bliss with a pair of 3-D guys. Unfortunately, the 2-D masters who sent the girls haven't forgotten them, and they've finally decided to solve the problem once and for all by wiping out Earth-space and everyone in it.

The Slayers Next: Phantom City: Running time 100 minutes; Software Sculptors; VHS English Subtitled $19.99 (US). Street Date: Nov. 11

Gourry has been kidnapped by Phibrizzo, the Hellmaster. Now, Lina must travel to the ruined city of Sairaag to rescue him — before Phibrizzo unleashes a wave of chaos that will destroy the universe.

Those Who Hunt Elves Volume 5: ADV; Running time: 60 minutes; VHS English dubbed $24.95 (US); Subtitled: $29.95 (US).

When Celcia loses all their money, Those Who Hunt Elves are forced to become Those Who Hunt Jobs. While Junpei and Celcia dig for dollars, Ritsuko flips burgers. But it's Airi's job on an elven Rodeo Drive that provides the greatest opportunity to find a spell fragment.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

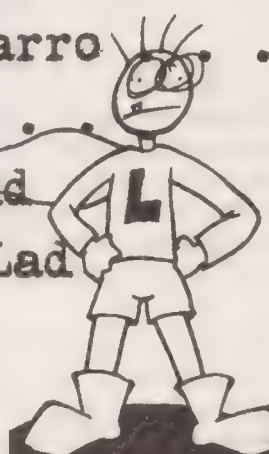
Watch for . . .

JAYNE HEITMEYER

TODD MCFARLANE

PETER JURASIK

Also . . .
Sean Stewart . . .
Yvonne Navarro . . .
Ron Boyd . . .
and
Lethargic Lad



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Quesada et al pushing artistic rock

Artist Joe Quesada and colleagues strive to stop what considers to be the downward spiral of comic books

Daredevil, along with the Black Panther, were two titles Quesda and his partner Jimmy Palmiotti insisted on when they were forging an agreement for the creation of the Marvel Knights line.

Like an alcoholic looking for a bar or a drug addict looking for a fix, Joe Quesada 's entrance into the comic book industry was an answer to an addiction — an artistic addiction.

By his own admission, Quesada fell into the comic business after letting his art degree gather dust for five years — five years when he didn't pick up so much as a paint brush.

But that changed when he came across a copy of Frank Miller's Dark Knight series in the '80s.

"It was addictive," he recalls. "It was a more mature take on the medium than had been the case before then."

The New York-based artist spent the next six weeks pulling together a portfolio that he thought was "kick ass"enough to submit to publishers.

In the end, the portfolio kicked down industry doors.

He landed a job as a colourist for Valiant comics and later with artist Jim Owsley.

But while Miller's realistic take on an aged Batman sparked renewed interest in comic books — not only with Quesada, but with fans in general, the approach was allowed to fizzle by Quesada's reckoning.

"Since the Watchmen, it's been all downhill."

"Since the Watchmen, it's been all downhill."

Quesada and a tight-knit group of colleagues, have done their best to push the artistic rock back up the hill.

Quesada and Jimmy Palmiotti formed Event Comics back in 1995. The company has lived up to its name ever since.

Quesada's creation Ash — a firefighting superhero — has become one of the top independent books on the market. It is so popular, that Dreamworks SKG is scheduled to release an Ash animated movie. As well some of the characters in Event Comic's stable of characters have been turned into action figures.

Event Comics has also published a number of titles featuring such characters as Painkiller Jane.

Like Miller's Batman and the Alan Moore's Watchmen, Quesada and his partners in Event Comics give readers some credit.

"We don't talk down to the reader," he said.

For more than a year, Quesada, Palmiotti and movie director Kevin Smith (Chasing Amy, Clerks) oversaw the Renaissance of a number of long-standing Marvel Comic heroes. Through a partnership between Quesada, Palmiotti and Marvel, Daredevil, Black Panther, the Punisher and the Inhumans all have received an artistic resuscitation.

"When we were approached by Marvel, we said that we had to have Daredevil as part of the package," Quesada recalled.

"When a project is creator-driven, the character has to be

Azrael was one of Quesada's creations while working with DC. The character eventually teamed up with Quesada's other creation, Ash.

loved and cared for and there was this feeling toward Daredevil.

Smith, who pens Daredevil, has presented a new look for the blind crimefighter.

In fact, even though the next 13 issues have been mapped out, there is an element of surprise as the storyline progresses — for Quesada and for the readers.

"When we killed Karen Page, no one saw it coming, but if you went back to the first issue, you could see the seeds had been planted."

For the rest of the titles which would form the Marvel Knights imprints, Quesada and Palmiotti picked characters that "would fit into the philosophy of Marvel Knights."

The Punisher was "a natural" selection, while the Inhumans were selected because Quesada appreciated their handling under legendary artist Jack Kirby. In the case of the Black Panther, Quesada believed it was a chance to give an under-appreciated character his due.

"I always thought it as the coolest idea for a character. He was far ahead of the times.

"Maybe he was too far."

But despite his affection for the heroes and their handling under previous industry legends, Quesada says the storylines won't be tied to the past.

"If you want to bring new kids into comic books, constantly referring to what's happening in the past isn't the way to do it."

"We try not to live in the past," he explained. "If you want to bring new kids into comic books, constantly referring to what's happening in the past isn't the way to do it."

One thing is certain, judging by industry sales figures, the approach has at least brought new readers to the four books.

Such a collaboration is nothing new for Quesada, Palmiotti and Event Comics. Earlier Event had formed a partnership with DC Comics to produce an Ash/Azrael miniseries.

Such a relationship, according to Quesada, offers the best of all publishing worlds.

Thanks to Quesada's and Palmiotti's experience running their own company, they have a "creator-owned mindset" which Quesada says leads to creative approaches to challenges that large corporations wouldn't normally consider.

And the other side of the partnership?

They bring a stable of known characters and the resources to support the project as it's being nurtured.

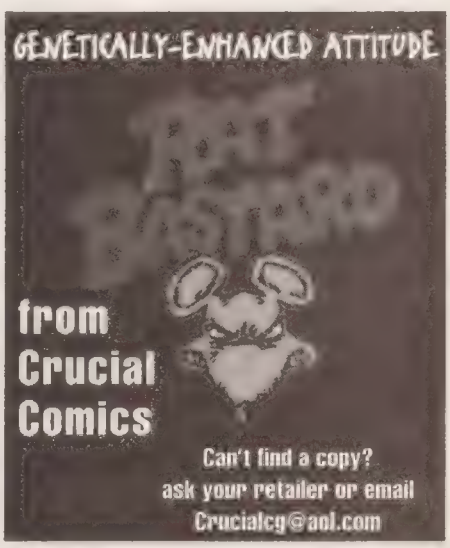
☆

Fast Facts

JOE QUESADA'S creation, Ash, is being developed into an animated feature by Dreamworks SKG.

AMONG HIS works are:
the cover to X-O Manowar #0, Ash: Cinder and Smoke, Painkiller Jane.

QUESADA has signed on to handle Ironman for Marvel Comics starting with issue 26.

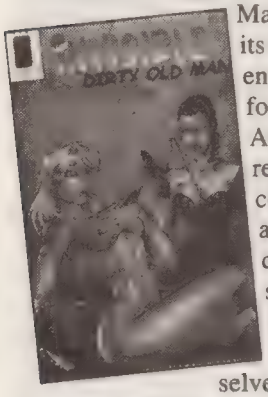


Recommended Reading

Invisible Dirty Old Man:

(S) Richard McEnroe; (A) various

The Plot: The last descendent of the original Invisible Man inherits the legendary formula. As a result, co-eds at a U.S. college suddenly find themselves sans clothing and the school's jocks find themselves in trouble with the law and bar patrons. Features funny plot and strong art.



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Ascension #22:

(S) Marcia Chen; (A) Brian Ching

Lucien, Andromeda and Hela find themselves trapped, while the conflict between the latter threatens to reach the boiling point.

Fine addition to a series that has continually provided a strong, compelling story accentuated by fine artwork.

☆☆☆☆

Batman In the Seventies:

This trade paperback compiles the diverse styles that marked the renditions of the Dark Knight during the Decade of Disco. A must for Batman fans or of artists such as Neal Adams or Jim Aparo.

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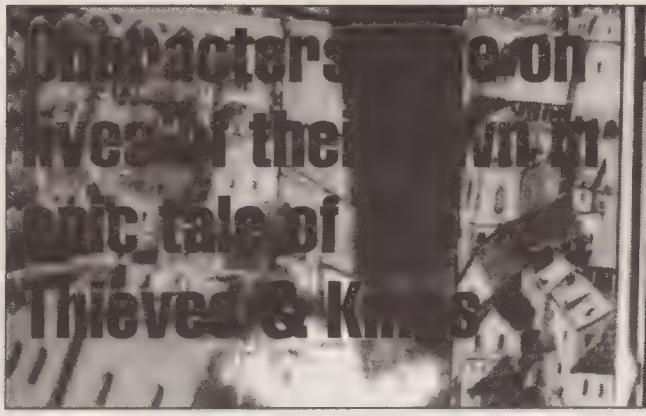
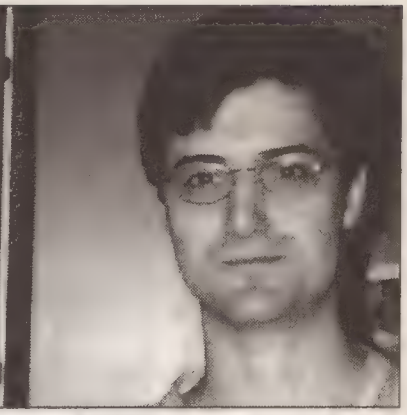




Parsec photo

A flu bug a few years ago allowed writer/artist Mark Oakley to lay the groundwork for the epic tale that was to become Thieves & Kings.

By the time he's done, Toronto artist Mark Oakley's work will rival Dave Sim's record for epic storytelling.

Oakley is the creator and driving force behind Thieves & Kings.

The bimonthly book is filled with monsters, sorcerers and other elements which comprise a fantasy. Thieves & Kings is a lush story which blends traditional storytelling with comic-book storytelling.

When he launched the book in 1994, Oakley told readers that the book would have a beginning and an end. In between the two, there would be about 16 years.

Along the way "there's the twists and turns that make a long comic-book story a good comic-book story," Oakley said.

Oakley began his artistic career at the tender age of 17 when he found employment at Lightbox Animation Studios in Toronto.

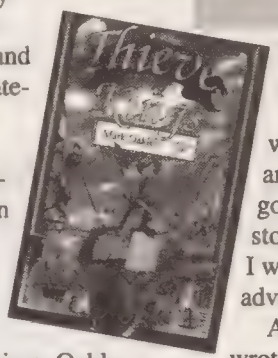
The job was a dream come true for the Montreal native. Long before he considered creating his own comic book, Oakley was an anime fan.

But the lustre began to come off his career choice.

"I found that everyone has their own vision (of a project) and not everyone's shared the same vision and to have some control, you need to be the director and that comes with its own set of problems," he explained.

Oakley also realized that comic books offered an opportunity to create a story and see it through to fruition in a matter of a couple of months — a much shorter timeframe than with animation projects.

For five years, Oakley compiled nearly 1,000 pages of related stories and background material, as well as drawing hundreds of sketches to serve as an information base for Thieves & Kings.



During this time, Oakley worked at all kinds of jobs, from lawn mower maintenance to insurance secretary in order to earn the start-up capital for I Box Publishing.

In September 1994, I Box Publishing was launched, publishing the first issue of Thieves & Kings.

Since then, I Box has produced more than 20 issues, three trade paperbacks and various reprints. The books readership reaches as far away as Hong Kong, Malaysia and Iceland. But Thieves & Kings had it's roots early in Oakley's teens.

"We're talking about when I was 14," Oakley recalled. "Back when I said 'I want to write like Terry Pratchett or Douglas Adams. Thieves & Kings was originally supposed to be a comedic story."

Oakley chalks the genesis for the series to a day when he was home with a cold.

"I was sitting there with an old computer and decided 'I'm going to write a story'," he recalled. "So I wrote a science fiction adventure."

And he wrote, and he wrote.

"It was a terrible, terrible book."

But it provided an opportunity to get some major storylines down on paper.

After he worked on transforming the book into comic-book form for a while, Oakley discovered something — comedy in literature worked very differently than the way he thought it did.

"After you write in a comedic fashion for awhile, your characters start to require stuff for the story to move on."

By adding this extra stuff, the character in the story, according to Oakley, "become more like people and less like clowns, as they do in the real work.

"It's almost as if they take on a life of their own and that life takes precedence over the story." ☆

The rat takes over

A genetically alterred sleuth named Roscoe becomes an unlikely hero

Crucial Comics was born out of frustration. Rat Bastard was born out of a teen's sketchbook.

The rest, as they say, is history.

At a recent convention, the company's merchandise and books were selling well among fans.

"Kids like the idea of wearing a shirt with the words 'Rat Bastard' across it," said Cliff Galbraith one of the creative forces behind Crucial Comics and its rat.

INDIE PROFILE

Like many small press publishers, Galbraith and Tim Bird were frustrated by what they saw (or didn't see) in comic books during the mid- to late- 80s.

"The books were too expensive, the quality was good, but the content was awful," explained Galbraith.

"The books all had these big splash pages and they weren't trying to tell a story," noted Bird. "We wanted to put out a book that we'd want to buy."

"We wanted to do a book that dealt with social issues and, god forbid, made the reader think," added Galbraith.

What made the dearth of good books even worse for the New Jersey-based artists was that it came on the heels of an explosion of creativity in the industry in the United States and in Europe.

The two rattled off a litany of artists who produced a number of titles during the hey-day of independent publishers and a burst of creativity at the larger publishers such as DC and Marvel.

Frank Miller, Mike Grell, Jim Starlin, Howard Chaykin and Timothy Truman are just a few of the artists who made an impression on the two men who would found Crucial Comics about a decade later.

Once the decision had been made to form the publishing company, the two had to decide what character was going to serve as its flagbearer.

As the two were tossing around ideas for characters, Bird came across the rat in one of Galbraith's sketchbooks.

"We started playing around with character and the style," recalled Galbraith. "We decided to keep the name and took it from there."

When the rat reached his final form, the two had created a worthy successor to Ralph Bakshi creations as Fritz the Cat and the '80s version of Mighty Mouse.

Rat Bastard is Rosco Rat a genetically altered rat (known as an Experimental Life Form in the book) who resides in what used to be known as Manhattan. In the rat's world, the city has become a place of 1,000-storey buildings which are more like nations than buildings.

"We weren't planning to start with him, we were thinking about doing something more mainstream," said Galbraith. "We were thinking about mirroring Marvel and doing a superhero book."

Rosco is a detective and his current case is to find out who has been killing his friends.

The books feature fewer splash pages and more panels, as the folks at Crucial Comics focus more on storytelling than the books that led to the company's creation did. Unlike other comic books, Rat Bastard isn't restricted to chronicling the details of its title character.

Each book also offers readers a series of book and music reviews, "of people we listen to," said Galbraith.

"People tend to be insular and we're trying to get them to read something besides comic books," explained Bird. "We're trying to encourage our readers to get out of the house and enjoy themselves." ☆

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Anonymity fleeting for Eaglesham

After a stint on Batman that drew rave reviews, the artist moves on to a project which will have a long-lasting effect on the world of the Dark Knight

Despite spending more than a decade in the comic book industry, Dale Eaglesham remains an unknown commodity among fans.

This circumstance is likely to change for the Quebec-based artist.

Even though he has worked on such high-profile titles as X-Calibre and Punisher for Marvel Comics, Eaglesham's recent work on Batman has pushed the artist's profile upwards.

Eaglesham was tapped to handle penciling chores on the four-issue "Fear of Faith" story arc in the Cataclysm series dealing with the aftermath of Gotham City's demolition (for readers who haven't kept up with the comic, Gotham was destroyed by an earthquake and was made a virtual no-man's land after most law-abiding survivors left town when the U.S. government refused to offer any aid). The series has gained some favourable buzz among readers and Eaglesham's work has been noted on more than a handful of Internet postings.

This wasn't his first exposure to Batman — he had worked on Shadows of Batman, Gotham Knight and Chronicles of Batman — but it was an assignment which made perfect use of Eaglesham's artistic strengths.

"I've been labeled as a realism artist," he explained. "I like to do art that's very street-level and gritty."

It was also the first time in his lengthy career that Eaglesham had to face a succession of tight deadlines, something he terms "a monster."

Making the task even more daunting was Eaglesham's concern that his need to meet deadlines would compromise his own standard of quality — it didn't.

Eaglesham's work on X-Calibre, the Punisher and Batman are pretty far removed from his initial interest in comics.

As a youngster, Eaglesham picked up the occasional comic book, but he was never a devotee. While attending Dawson College he became "a big fan of Conan." (In a novel piece of symmetry, the writer of the Savage Sword of Conan titles which captured Eaglesham's attention also served as editor of the Cataclysm stories.)

"I always loved fantasy stories, the problem is that there isn't a whole lot of it now."

At the school, some friends saw some of his drawings and suggested he pursue a career in art. The concept of being paid for doing something he enjoyed was intriguing, so Eaglesham decided to pursue it.

Characters TM and © DC Comics

Known for his particular style of art, Eaglesham's work on Batman brought a sense of gritty realism to the title.

"I always loved fantasy stories, the problem is that there isn't a whole lot of it now."

After some gigs with a handful of smaller publishers, Eaglesham's portfolio caught the attention of Marvel Comics and he began his tenure among the large publishers.

After chronicling the Dark Knight's adventures after the fall of Gotham, Eaglesham helped rebuild part of Batman's world. DC editors selected him to redesign Wayne Manor.

His conception — more gothic and immense than its predecessor — will be the one which all future Batman artists will use whenever they illustrate a Batman title. And it will ensure that his stamp on the Dark Knight's mythos will remain in place for some time.

Somewhere down the road — way down the road — Eaglesham could venture out on his own and begin publishing his own title.

"I spent a long time trying to get jobs in the business. Now that I have them, I'm not ready to give that up."

Although he doesn't want to give too much away, Eaglesham did hint that it will be unique.

I can't really label it. It falls between the cracks of what types of books are being published now," he said of the challenge he foresees. "It's so hard to sell anything that isn't a superhero book."

☆

Eternal Romance collected into trade paperback

Long-running title mixes romance and horror in comic-book form

As a writer and an artist, Janet Hetherington works to capture a vision on paper.

She also seeks to offer something to modern readers something she enjoyed as a youngster — comic books.

Hetherington is the creator and the force behind Eternal Romance and its heroine, Destine.

In creating Destine, Hetherington sought to combine two of the favourite things in her life — romance comic books and horror movies.

"I love the idea that romance could go on forever, and giving romance comics a supernatural twist means that this concept can be taken literally!," Hetherington explained. "Mainstream comic book publishers like DC and Marvel used to produce tons of romance comics for girls to read in the 40s to 70s."

While Hetherington had a vision of what she wanted to do, it took a message from artist Dave Sim — the creator of the warrior aardvark, Cerebrus — to push her toward her final creation.

"Inspired by Sim's message that cartoonists with vision should pursue self-publishing, I decided to put together a comic book about "Love! Heartache! Vampires!" which became Eternal Romance," she said of her meeting with Sim.

Before talking to the Ontario artist at a Montreal convention, Hetherington's foray into romance/vampire comics had been a three-page sample submission to a publisher of erotic vampire tales.

The sample was rejected and Hetherington found herself uneasy with the overt sexual situations and nudity she had to draw.

In developing Eternal Romance, Hetherington strove to recapture the essence of the romance comics of her youth — the campiness "but with an edge."

By Hetherington's description, Destine is the vampire diva of dating, who likes to dispense advice to the lovelorn, but whose own love life is a mess.

In October, a selection of Eternal Romance stories from the past few years (as well as a new story) will be published as a 96-page trade paperback, Eternally Yours: Illustrated Stories of Eternal Romance.

"I love the idea that romance could go on forever."

Like the regular Eternal Romance book, the paperback will be distributed in Canada and the United States.

With the popularity of Buffy the Vampire Slayer television series, Destine is poised to ride the wave with comic book readers. And there are signs that it has caught the wave.

In the two years since Eternal Romance first hit shops in North America, Hetherington's creation has garnered fans among comic industry critics and among the readers she wants to reach most.

"Girl readers in particular have really responded to the 'Eternal Romance' concept." Hetherington said.

In a recent Comic Buyer's Guide, Tony Isabella said, "It's a fun title that puts a supernatural twist on the love comics of the '50s and '60s."

Hetherington and Destine have also gained the notice of the mainstream press in the U.S.

"A fun, G-rated read that is especially good for pre-teen girls scouring the comic shelves for anything interesting," wrote Beth Hannan Rimmels, in the Long Island Voice.

Besides Eternal Romance, Hetherington and her partner, Ronn Sutton, have created the comic strips Jannie Weezie and Spinnerette — on which Hetherington serves as writer and Sutton as the artist.

However, their collaborations have grown less frequent recently since Sutton began working on Elvira, Mistress of the Dark for Claypool Comic.

NO! SOB!! I CAN NEVER MARRY YOU! MY FAMILY IS.. CURSED!
Hetherington '97
Destine
CAN LOVE CONQUER ALL... EVEN THE MOST EVIL OF CURSES THAT HAS PLAGUED GENERATIONS? MEET LIN AND JAB, A MODERN-DAY ROMEO AND JULIET-- DESPERATE TO BE TOGETHER, YET DOOMED TO BE APART BECAUSE OF THE VILE LEGACY BEQUEATHED TO THESE YOUNG LOVERS MY AID IS REQUESTED TO HELP THEM LIFT THE CURSE, AND DIRECT THE COUPLE TOWARD...
ETERNAL Romance
© 1997 Janet L. Hetherington
1

Comic Briefs

Ross Signs On . . .

Oni Press announced that artist Alex Ross will contribute a second cover to Paul Dini's Jingle Belle number 2.

The second part of the mini-series will be presented as a flip book, featuring both a painted cover by Lynne Naylor and the Ross painting.

Marz joins company . . .

Writer Ron Marz has joined CrossGeneration Comics.

The former Green Lantern writer becomes one of CrossGeneration's two principal writers. Marz will work on the company's first title — scheduled for release in May.

Claudio Castellini had previously signed on as penciller for the yet-to-be-named title. The book is expected to introduce readers to the primary characters of the CrossGeneration universe.

Demons begone . . .

The same preacher in Charlotte, NC, who took aim at Barney the Dinosaur for being a minion of the devil has now turned his sights on Japanese import, Pokémon.

The city's newspaper quotes Rev. Joe Chambers: "The whole scheme is sorcery. Nothing but witchcraft and sorcery from beginning to end."

He blames Pokémon and related "occult material" for the plague of violence that has struck America's youth and has tied the character to the Columbine tragedy.

The lost issue . . .

Jimmie Robinson's young-adult series Evil and Malice will end after three issues rather than the scheduled fourth.

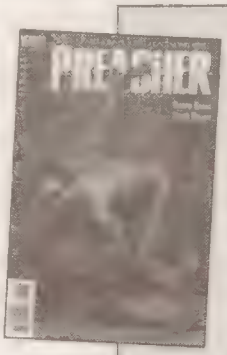
The Image title was intended as a graphic novel, but was repackaged as a four-issue miniseries.

Now Robinson plans to wrap it up in three. Image and Robinson are discussing the next Evil and Malice project.

PARSEC's Top 10 Countdown

These are the top selling books in Canada, according to a national survey of retailers. To find out who's taking part in the survey, please see page 66

#1 Preacher 57



The highly touted Vertigo title makes its first appearance ing the Top 10 a good one.
Story: Garth Ennis
Art: Steve Dillion

#2 Spawn 87

Title slips back to the second spot.
Story: Brian Holguin
Pencils: Greg Capullo
Inks: Danny Miki

#3 X-Men 95

The millennium plotline nears its concusion
Story:Alan Davis
Pencils: Tom Raney
Inks: Scott Hanna

#4 Batman: Dark Victory

Story Jeph Loeb
Art: Tim Sale
13-issue series kicks off to rave reviews

#5 JLA 36

The opening saga of the World War III storyline
Story: Grant Harrison
Pencils: Howard Porter
Inks: John Dell

#6 Day of Judgment 4

The mini-series' penultimate entry is Hell on Earth.
Story: Geoff Johns
Pencils Matt Smith
Inks: Steve Mitchell

#7 Authority 8

The final part of four issue storyline.
Story: Warren Ellis;
Pencils: Bryan Hitch
Inks: Paul Neary

#8 Hulk 9

The Thing vs. the Hulk
Story: Jerry Ordway
Pencils: Ron Garney (co-plotters)
Inks: Sal Buscema

#9 Top Ten 4

Gograh goes on a rampage and pukes
Story: Alan Moore
Art: Gene Ha and Zander Cannon

#10 Detective 739

Comissioner Gordon goes on trial thanks to Two-Face
Story: Greg Rucka
Art: Damion Scott
Inks: John Floyd

Comic Shop Directory

British Columbia

Comic & Book Emporium	1247 Granville St., Vancouver, V6Z 1M5	(250) 682-3019	C BI RPG AR MI M AP B Md HS	
Curious Books and Comics	631 Johnson St., Victoria, V8W 1M7	(250) 384-1656	C BI RPG AS MI AP CC M Md WL	
Up-Start Comics & Games	1483A Bowen Rd., Nanaimo, V9S 1G4	(250) 741-0101	C BI RPG AR MI M AP B Md HS	

Alberta

Comic-Kazi	Northland Village, Calgary, P2L 2J8	(403) 286-0544	C BI RPG AS Md M AP CC M HS WL B	
Saturn Comics	5726 104 St., Edmonton, T6H 2K2	(780) 430-0598	C BI RPG AS B M AP CC OL Cat WL	**

Saskatchewan

8th Street Books & Comics	1010 8th St. E., Saskatoon, S7H 0R9	(306) 343-6624	C BI M AP CC Md WL B	
Phoenix Comics	2806 Dewdney Ave., Regina, S4T 0X7	(306) 757-9091	C RPG BI AS CC M WL B	

Manitoba

Comic Cave	1104 Corydon Ave., Winnipeg, S7H 0R9	(306) 318-9636	C BI M AP CC Md WL Cat OL	

Ontario

Big B Comics	1045 James St..	Hamilton, L8K 1B4	(905) 312-6977	C BI RPG Md AP CC M HS WL B	
Comics North	106 Elm St.	Sudbury, P3C 1T5	(705) 674-1015	C BI RPG AS AR Md MI AP CC M HS WL	
Now & Then	90 Queen St. S.	Kitchener, N2G 1V9	(519) 744-5571	C BI RPG AS AR Md MI AP CC M WL	

Quebec

Empire Comics	1221 Crescent St..,Montreal, H3G 2B1	(514) 871-1402	C BI RPG AP CC AS WL B	

Prince Edward Island

The Comic Hunter	173 Queen St. Charlottetown, C1A 4B4	(902) 566-2926	C BI RPG AP CC AS WL B	

New Brunswick

Stange Adventures Comic Books	384 Queen St. Fredericton, E3B 1B2	(506) 450-3759	C BI RPG MI HS AP CC AS WL B WL M Md	

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** Saturn Comics' website for ordering can be found at www.compusmart.ab.ca

Legend

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RPG = Roleplaying Games	MO = Mail Order	Cat = Catalogue Available	Md = Models

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Comic news and more in every issue

Getting out of hell isn't easy

RAT BABIES

Story by
Jake P. van der Merwe
Art by
Terry Pallot

"You owe!"

Her voice was a scabrous whisper.

The fear was strangling him. It was a chokehold that blocked the white-hot scream of mindless panic lodged in his throat, like a clot of burning vomit.

"You owe! For the children . . ."

He shivered violently, his body oily with sweat, and tried to speak. It was a futile effort — as always. He could barely manage a whistling gasp.

She squatted malevolently on his chest, her pink tail a naked obscenity, the black beads of her eyes holding him. Her gaze was vicious, her breath a reeking charnel pit.

He knew her, of course, knew her of old. She was his — always had been. She was a souvenir, one might say . . .

"Easy lad! Don't show any fear now, for God's sake! They're watching! It's just Bert, understand? He is doing the Hole Song . . ."

He shuddered, feeling her claws through the thick comforter, scratching . . . And suddenly he could smell it. It was on her breath. Her whole body reeked of it. And just like that, he was back. Back in The Hole.

That's what they called it back then: The Hole. Precisely like that, with the capitals clearly audible. It was the one alternative their captors had for the firing squad, which was their standard response to any major infringement of camp regulations. For minor infringements, there had always been The Hole.

It was not a big hole, really — about five-by-five at the bottom. But what it lacked in circumference was more than compensated for in depth. The damn place was so deep that the sun never quite reached the bottom, leaving it dark, with a steady seepage of dank, putrid water down there.

The Hole.

"Steady now, lad. Just try to ignore it."

Walter Millard. Good old Wally. Always there to help, to encourage. When they brought him back up after only five days, he had been a raving lunatic, singing hymns and screaming invective with equal zeal.

They shot him before sunset. Just another war casualty, folks. Died for God and Country.

The Hole. Ah, dear God.

She breathed her vileness across his face and he shuddered, remembering . . .

The punishment was simplicity itself: They let you down by a long rope and left you to rot at the bottom for as long as it pleased the camp commandant. Water was provided by the seepage, food was the leftovers from the guard's plate — if he remembered to dump it into The Hole after he'd eaten, and if you could get to it before the rats.

Eating the scraps wasn't so bad, really. The guards did, after all, get better food than the prisoners. The water was horrible, though. It was the same water in which you, like all the prisoners who occupied The Hole before you, urinated and defecated as the need arose. Sleep was an atrocity. It was impossible to lie down. So you had to sit on your haunches, your back against the dank wall, and try to keep as much of yourself out of the water as you could. Your feet were the obvious exception. He had seen the feet of men who had come out of The Hole after only four days. They had been white and wrinkled, like something that had already begun to decompose. Sleep invariably produced excruciating cramps and a cold, blinding pain in all your joints.

And then there were the rats.

They did not bother you while you were awake. At least you could see them coming and shout and splash to chase them away. But as soon as you fell asleep they started their careful approach, getting closer and closer, shivering with avid anxiety, until one got bold enough to take a nibble. Then they would be all over you, and you would come awake screaming, beating them off you with arms that had gone numb with cold.

The prisoners on top, out there in the warm sun, hardly noticed the screams anymore. "The Hole Song," they called it. Only those who had done the Hole Song themselves — and survived it — would glance up nervously from whatever they were doing. Here and there one would rub his joints to ease the half-forgotten pains, while another might experience an involuntary shudder.

There were not many of them, though, for not many survived The Hole. If they left you in there long enough you died — starvation or cold or pestilence or whatever. Then they would let another prisoner down to bring you up for burial — or rather, as much of you as the rats had left. Or you might come out alive, but die a few days later from influenza or

He was no longer certain of the number of days he had spent down there. He wasn't even quite sure that he was not already dead and in Hell — a very special Hell for overly conceited POWs.

dysentery or infected rat bites. A few, like Wally, had gone mad.

No big thing.

Just another raving lunatic to liven up the atmosphere. Just another fun-filled day in camp, folks.

As far as he knew, he was the only one who had ever gone into The Hole a second time. The two or three other prisoners who had been foolish enough to invoke a second trip down had opted out in the most obvious way: They simply attacked the guards and were shot on the spot.

Not him, though. He kept his cool. He was special, wasn't he? You bet your ass. He had survived The Hole once and he could do it again. No problem. Just hang in there, right? Right.

By the tenth day he had been confused and mildly delirious. He was no longer certain of the number of days he had spent down there. He wasn't even quite sure that he was not already dead and in Hell — a very special Hell for overly conceited POWs. Up until then he'd had admirable success rescuing the guard's scraps from the rats. On one occasion he'd even managed to kill one of the rodents — more by accident than by skill — and had used it to stretch his meager diet. He had eaten the whole rat, making eager whimpering sounds as he devoured not only the meat, but also the intestines and the more tender parts of the skin. The tail was too tough, even for him, and he sat there crying over it like a small child. But that was alright, because he soon happened upon another bug — on of many that infested The Hole — and popped it into his mouth as casually as a kid tossing a peanut. It was one of the tastier ones, and the rat's tail was soon forgotten.

The delirium was a blessing, in a way. It seemed to push the reality of his abominable existence aside to some extent. And he became quite companionable with the rats too, holding long conversations with them as if they were old friends. In his more lucid moments he recognized this as a sure sign of mental illness, but such moments were, thankfully, rare. He had night eyes by then, able to see in the permanent gloom with perfect ease. But he did not need his eyes to tell him that he was turning into a skeleton. He needed more nourishment. Badly.

Some time later (days? weeks? an eternity? who knew?) the biggest female rat gave birth to a litter of pink, hairless little things that sucked at her belly as she lay there panting, her marble eyes unblinking, her whiskers quivering apprehensively. He tried his best to explain the circumstances to her, not sure that she would understand, but trying anyway. He stopped when he realized that he was drooling. He wiped his mouth and looked at her, no words left to explain.

Then, one by one, he plucked the little things off her and gobbled them as fast as he could, crunching the soft little bones between his aching teeth and muttering, "It will be okay" between bites, while the mother looked on in hostile, helpless rage.

An hour later, they let the rope down to haul him out, his sentence finally over. He clung to the rope for dear life, his eyes clamped shut against the vicious glare of the sunlight up there, and felt her farewell bite on his leg. The bolt of pain transported the message to his brain as clearly as if she had been shouting it:

"You did not have to eat them! You did not need them!"

Back in the sun he wanted to scream and rave and shout and dance. But Wally had been there to stop him. Not quite the same old Wally anymore, of course. He had, after all, been dead for several weeks, with half his face shot away. His voice was the same though — calm and full of encouragement.

"Steady, lad. Be very quiet now. Just go to your bunk and lie down. Steady now."

And even though old Wally had not looked all that hot, he had heeded the advice, because it was good advice. He had gone to his bunk and dropped onto it like a bag of garbage. He stank to high heavens, his clothes were in tatters and his ribs were sticking out like the devil's xylophone. But he was alive! Sick, yes. Running one hell of a fever, yes. But alive!

Alive, praise God! Alive!

That was the first night, the first of many, that he woke up with that unbearable weight on his chest. Woke up to find those merciless black pebble-eyes boring into his.

"You owe . . ."

He had a vague recollection of trying to explain. Perhaps because he had been delirious, perhaps because everything had still been fresh, but that night, at least, he had still been able to talk. So he had reasoned with her — or tried to, rather. It didn't do much good, though. She was not listening. She never did.

Oh, it was not real, of course. It was a dream. He knew that. It had always been a dream — a dream born of the living hell he had known down there in that pit of horrors. And now, as always, this realization brought a vast relief as he struggled

He to wake up, fighting back the huge scream lurking just inside his throat.

"You owe . . ." she hissed, but fading, thank God. Fading fast now.

He gasped and felt the last of the dream slip mercifully away, leaving him sweating in the big double bed next to his wife. A quick glance assured him that she was still sleeping peacefully and he was grateful for that. He did not want to wake her up with this, because then he'd have to explain about The Hole . . . and the rats. And how could he do that? How do you tell your beautiful young wife that you had once dined on such delicacies as worms and insects? That your last meal in a stinking hellhole had been a batch of newborn infants? It was simply too monstrous.

He shivered, his forehead clammy and his mouth tasting like dogshit.

The dream had bothered him constantly during the first two years after his return. Then he met Denise. He never knew such camaraderie could exist outside the army — let alone between a man and a woman. The first time after they had made love, she with wild abandon and he with something like reverence, he had known that he would never look at another woman again.

They were married six months later. After the marriage the dream began to fade. It was as if his newfound joy had filled him so completely that there was no room left for the vileness of his war memories. One night after loving, which had been slow and languorous and magical, he drew her close and whispered softly against her neck: "Denise, every time we make love, the war seems to retreat another six months."

She had hugged him back fiercely and he had felt the wetness of her tears on his cheek. By the time she fell pregnant he had not dreamed of The Hole for almost a year, and he had begun to forget that hated litany.

"You owe . . ."

Cautiously, he had begun to hope that it was all over. The war, the camp, The Hole, all finally over. Even the dreams.

The day baby Andy came home, a small bundle of clean smells and soft-skinned pureness, his happiness was complete — until that night, when he had the dream again, back in full force, worse than ever. That was the one occasion he had been unable to hold back the scream. His Hole Song had scared the hell out of Denise and had woken the baby. He gave her some cock-and-bull story about a nightmare and pooh-poohed the whole thing, not telling anybody what was happening. Alone, he grimly battled the dream the way he had battled the enemy before his capture and terrible imprisonment.

He fought it with everything he had — first about once a month, then once a week and finally just about every night. He grew increasingly afraid of going to bed and, once there, found himself too scared to sleep. He started reading in bed — thick, elaborate volumes that required a great deal of concentration — and ignored Denise's half-joking, half-serious complaints that the honeymoon seemed to be finally over. He read until the letters became a blur, then got up and made coffee and read again. He read until sleep overtook him with a stealth he could not hope to combat. And then she would come. Always.

"You owe . . ."

He stifled another shudder and got shakily out of bed, careful not to disturb Denise. He padded on bare feet to the tiled bathroom, heart still hammering, mouth as dry as tissue paper. He urinated for what seemed like forever against the rim of the toilet bowl, taking aim in the weak moonlight that filtered through the frosted glass of the bathroom window. Afterwards he tiptoed into the nursery. It seemed that he could never get enough of looking at his son, never tired of looking at that sweet face, the tiny nub of a nose, the . . .

After the marriage the dream began to fade. It was as if his newfound joy had filled him so completely that there was no room left for the vileness of his war memories.

She was in the crib, her blood-speckled whiskers quivering as she sniffed at what was left of baby Andy's face. She must have started at the soft flesh of the cheeks, because that was where the worst damage had been done. The small body was quite still, of course. Just a husk now, never to grow into anything at all.

Why didn't he scream?

The single thought clanged through his head in a senseless cacophony as he felt his own scream rekindled, starting to build up deep down there in the viscera.

Why didn't he scream? I could have come in time!

Why didn't he scream?

Then, while his fingers located and gripped the baseball bat in the corner, he saw the torn throat and realized that she had not started at the cheeks, after all. That was when the scream was finally torn out of him — a white, glassy sound that shattered the night, while he swung the bat methodically out and down, out and down, beating the jerking brown body into a pulp of blood and coarse brown hair that still exuded hatred and malevolence, even in death.

"You bitch! You bitch! You bitch!"

His voice was an insane keening sound that rose higher and higher as he slammed the bat down again and again with a force that tore at his shoulder muscles and violated his back. He was raving with grief and anguish, his face a contorted mask of pain and stark dementia.

Only when Denise's piercing screams finally penetrated the babbling cloud that used to be his brain, did he stop, his breathing hard and laborious. He stared at her dumbly, without comprehension, as she screamed the word "murderer" over and over, her shaking finger pointing at the crib in front of him, her mouth twisted with horror, her face hag-like and, for the first time since he had known her, ugly. He wanted to comfort her then, but his own grief numbed him into passive inactivity. He looked down into the crib and felt the last seam of his mind tearing loose as he saw his son's body the way it was — no torn throat, no half-eaten cheeks. Just the broken, beaten, bloodied corpse of what used to be his first-born.

There was no sign of a rat anywhere, of course.

☆

Beauty doesn't last forever

DEAD FLOWERS

Story by
Jim Erkiletian
Art by
Larry Desouza

She was superb.

Men unconsciously shoved their own wives out of the way to open doors for her, trading a glimpse of shining smile and retreating ankles for weeks of spousal disharmony and abuse.

Once, in the market, she presented a startling image wearing a light green semi-transparent blouse and no bra while inspecting a small honeydew melon.

She was an exotic dancer and sometimes model who had completed two years of the architecture course at UBC — dark, with long black hair and skin like polished teak, and legs that made exclusive sculptures hide in shame. But the pigmentation had ended with her eyes, which were very light blue-white and emitted moonbeams. Wolves and panthers had learned to suffer adoration under their glow. Not to mention hoards of men and not a few women.

For two years we circled around each other warily until, without really understanding how, the circle was on the outside and we were on the inside. Together. Alone.

We moved into the building her father had designed and built. Or had she designed it and he built it? Or did it grow by accident from the rows of slummy mid-victorian caricatures that are falling all over the city. Perhaps a bastard offspring of some bright glassy yuppy tower's rape of one of those old four-story houses with the ornate trim and the delicate artistry of construction carpentry crossed with old-country sensibility.

Then she hit me.

With the palm of her hand on the side of the face where all the little nerve-endings feather-touch the muscles that allow us to express the whole gamut of emotions from ecstatic joy to psychotic rage. Where all the language that is mostly gesture and expression originates. Where we say what we mean, beyond words and lies and definitions. On the face of the face.

Sharp pain rebounded from the centre of my brain and the world blurred. As the mist dissipated, black asphalt roads stretched into little crow's feet, crinkled on either side of her face. Lying there behind the moonbeam eyes crouched a twisted fear.

The little pinpoints of light gradually coalesced into consciousness and I became more awake than I had been in years. Over two years.

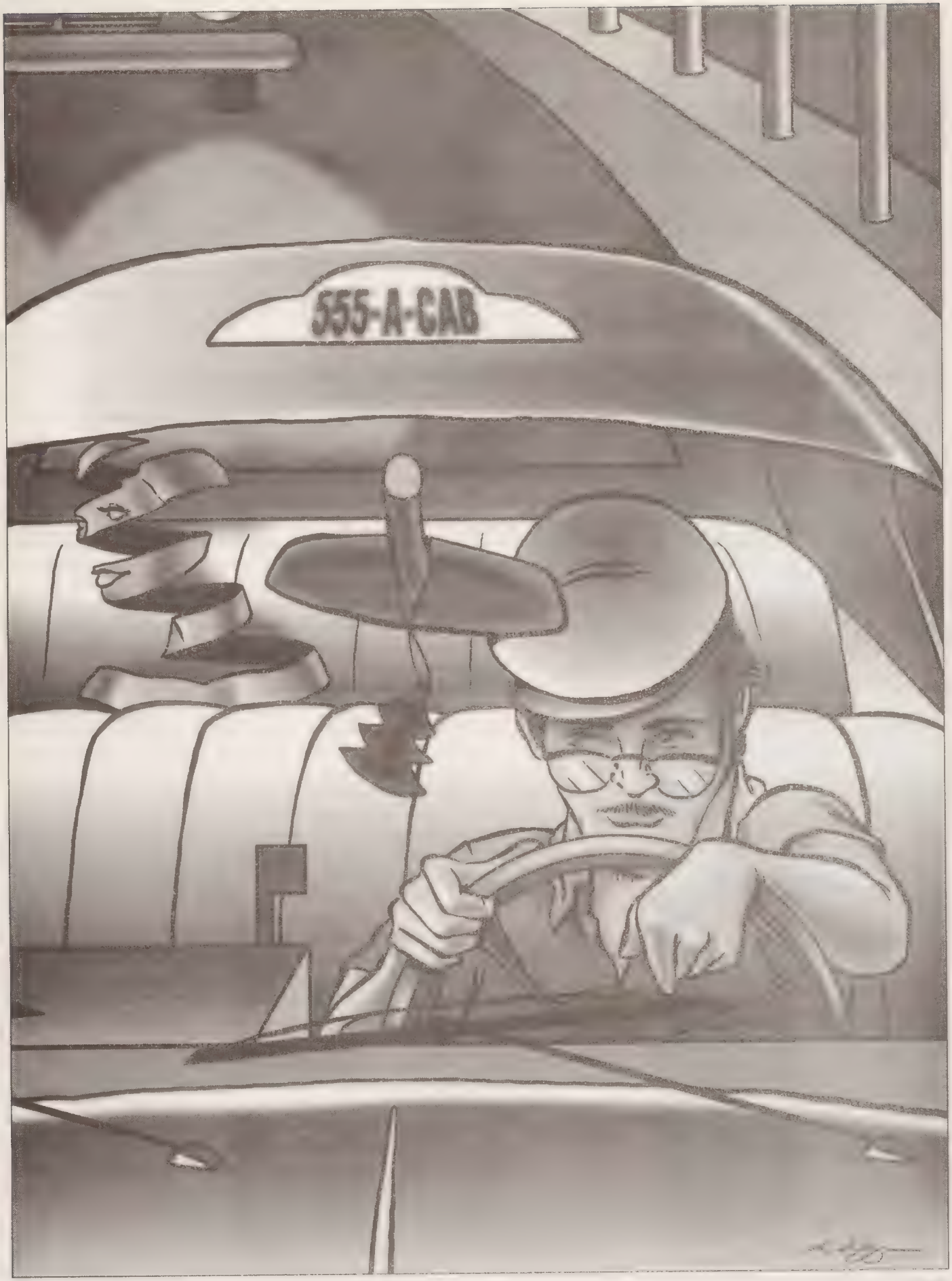
I was driving cab then, twelve-hour no-frills night shifts hugging wet city streets from six in the evening to six in the morning. On Mondays and Tuesdays, I spent time at the university rounding out a degree in Anthropology. I may have seen her there. Or she may have seen me.

She was dancing in a club downtown, the Saffron, one of Dirk Marik's less wholesome, more lucrative booze-and-babes joints. She didn't know anyone at work well enough for a ride home, so she called a cab. When she found I was a part-time student too, she took the number of my cab and began to call for me personally now and again. For the next three months I was a trustworthy ride home twice a week or so. Nothing more.

Then one Sunday, with a full moon lighting the wet streets, she asked me to take the long way around, by the bay. She asked me, rather than told me. Drivers notice those things.

I dropped the flag and clicked it back to the mileage position so she wouldn't have to pay for the time in the cab, only the mileage. She didn't indicate she had noticed, but tipped me double when we got to her place forty-five minutes later.

Sunday's are weird. For the money, they're almost as good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No telephone calls please

as Saturdays, or even Fridays, but the action is unpredictable. One minute you're driving some little old lady home from church, the next you're hassling with some stoned-out speed-freak trying to find a safe place to cool out from a three-day jag. The Sabbath. Heavy with spirituality and the unpredictability it carries like a scorpion around its neck.

I thanked her and headed on downtown to cash out.

We had learned a bunch of superficial crap about each other by this time, and had surmised some more. Most of it was the kind of stuff you get from cheap novels or see on beer commercials, idealistic nonsense we make up about each other to keep from admitting life is made up of one average after another. Fantasies designed to hide the truth of what you're really peddling.

After the magic hour of four A.M., the lines between real and fake tend to waver and bend around each other, chasing their own tails. If you manage to keep from falling asleep at the wheel, popping No-doz or mints, sticking your nose out the window into the wind, pushing against your eyelids with the tips of your fingers, rubbing the back of your own neck, and all the other gimmicks that only work for short periods of time, your mind's mirror can reflect some pretty weird images. Like the feet sticking straight up out of the garbage can on Forty-Sixth, or the guy with the attache case in the gorilla suit walking down Kingsway. I'm not too sure about the gargoyle sitting at the bus stop at Burrard and Third. It wasn't there later in the morning, even though the buses hadn't started running yet.

I didn't see her again for a couple of months. Then, again on a Sunday night, with a bright, almost-full moon, there was another personal for me at some dive on the waterfront. Even though it was around 4:00 AM (Monday morning, actually, although the Sunday unpredictability stretches into the week sometimes all through Monday) she looked like she'd stepped out of a page of a designer magazine as she approached the cab from the dark back doorway of the club. Cool as precambrian fossil, delicate and sturdy at the same time. Her slate expression broke in a smile when she saw me waiting.

She didn't ask me to take the long way around this time. But when we pulled up to her place, she asked if I'd like to come in for a cup of coffee. I radioed my position to let the dispatcher know where I was stepping out.

In this business a cup of coffee can save your life, if you learn not to drink too much of it. You also learn that when someone asks if you "trust" them, you're about to get ripped off. And when somebody offers you a drink, they aren't being friendly. They're trying to see if they can get you to drink and drive so they can get you into the kind of trouble that caused them to end up drinking in a cab. Caution becomes the better part of good sense in the scramble for street justice and a buck or two in the bargain. Which ain't common at this time of day in any city.

She said coffee at just the right time.

She held the door of her building open for me, letting the buzzer cut through my disposition. The story of the spider and the fly flickered in the glass partition, but the basic elements weren't there. Something else was though. Like a soft velvet python crying.

And there was something else I should have paid attention to. Something that totally bypasses the heart, the mind, the genitals, and speaks directly to the stomach's little fluttering butterflies, fighting to get out of the dark, wet interior of the mind. Something about sin and sign and slow empathy squeezed from a tube of flower petals. Something too complicated to ignore, but so vague and insubstantial it was no more graspable than sun-caught morning mist. Vaporous and mean.

The building was as sterile as most city apartment buildings. But her apartment wasn't. Clothes, dishes, books and papers were scattered here and there. She didn't apologize for the mess, like most people would have, just went straight to the kitchen nook and started making a pot of coffee.

Her work space around the computer and the drafting table was a stark contrast to the rest of the place. The few books on the shelf above were in alphabetical order by author, Leonardo, Wright, Fuller, Allen Mackie, besides some others I didn't recognize. The pencils in the tray were sharpened, honed to fine needle-points with 180 grit sandpaper.

I suddenly felt comfortable. There was a real professional something stuck in here among the chaos. Doctor hooker musical precision mixed with spine-chilling

The central core was developed outward from a Moebius band, extended in several directions to create a four-level maze. It would take weeks to learn your way around in there.

chaos? I liked it, whatever it was.

There was a part of a drawing on the drafting table board. It looked like it might be a temple for some strange voo-doo cult. Or maybe an insane asylum for people who didn't want to get well.

I'd been staring at it for a couple of minutes when she brings two cups of hot coffee on a little tray. "Like it?" she asked, with a thin eyebrow cocked into a question.

"Uh, yeah." I took a sip. Mocha with a touch of cinnamon. Probably Nicaraguan, or maybe Costa Rican. She had good taste, good taste buds and tasty looking buds poking into the front of her light blouse that made it difficult to notice anything else in the room with clarity.

As I took a sip of the java she was eye-balling me with those windows to the moon, waiting for me to guess what it was. I broke first.

"What's it going to house? Acidheads and perverts?"

She giggled like champaign bubbles perking up through Ernie on Sesame Street. Then she looked over the rim of her coffee cup as she took a slow sip. The combination had obviously in times past resulted in hearts skipping a beat or two, then skipping down the nearest country lane looking for a place to melt. I pretended to react, but only enough to let her know I do have an active set of balls and don't swing in some other direction. No point in getting my hopes up. Cabbies and exotic dancers are best kept at each other's arms lengths. Our life style is much the same but the goals are generally contradictory, if not in outright opposition. Brothers and sisters should beware of each other's sexuality if they don't want to court disaster. Literally.

"It's for kids," she finally said. She set her cup carefully on the low table situated next to the drafting table. "See all the nooks and crannies, and towers and ladders and stuff? Kids like to climb and explore and swing."

I looked back at the drawing. The central core was developed outward from a Moebius band, extended in several directions to create a four-level maze. It would take weeks to learn your way around in there. There were slides and swings and things that looked like they would swing you around until you were sick to your stomach, every kid's ideal. The front door looked like a big mouth with fangs coming up from the bottom and down from the top. She was right. Kids would love it in there.

I took another sip of her coffee. "You'd better have a doctor on call for all the accidents that could happen in a place like that.".

She laughed again. "That's what I'm doing now. Designing the safety system. See how everything fits together?" And she was onto the subject like a pride of lions on a bale of catnip. I flowed along for the ride feeling kind of like a big glob of hot fudge on a scoop of vanilla ice cream. It was a good, well thought-out project, and the more she talked, the more I wanted to hear. And touch, of course.

Male drivers tend to develop brother/sister relationships with the women they meet on the job. The barmaids, dancers, hookers, party girls, waitresses and such who live and work at night, bouncing from jobs and tricks and sometimes needing a quick taxi-ride out of danger, don't often get involved with their drivers. Cabbies are more likely to score with classy women from the British Properties or Shaunessy looking for something out-of-the-ordinary, but not too kinky, with someone who will be easy to shake after its over. Dependability without responsibility, and a job on a set of wheels so she knows where you are all the time, but not vice versa.

This was different. Stereotypical nonsense would not be able to crawl out of the panelling and reestablish its hegemony here in this place with this beautiful architect/dancer.

For nearly an hour, I didn't say ten words. She told me a great deal about her project, about how it worked, and about how she would see it actually built some day. She implied she was experimenting already with the actual construction techniques somewhere.

After the second cup of coffee, I made my move. I leaned forward in the middle of a sentence, put both my hands on her forearms, looked her straight in the eyes and said, "Thanks for the coffee. I'm going now, but I'm very much interested in your project, and in you. I'd like to come back to see you next week sometime."

Her eyes flicked left, right, left again, focusing briefly on each of mine in turn. A worried look crested on her brow, then sank in the undertow of her smile. Tiny points of blue flame flashed in the centre of her pupils. "Tuesday I could have breakfast ready by seven or so. If you'd like." She'd been thinking my schedule. A sign.

I felt like a hummingbird had kissed my cheek and fled. The hard part was over. The difficult part might not start for weeks or months or years. For better or worse, richer or poorer, in paranoia or wonder, despair or joy, we had something going. It was a whole brand spanking new swimming pool full of lime flavoured jello.

As I hit the street, dawn was sweeping over the hills to the east, and gravity was finding it difficult to retain control of my feet. The inlet in the distance sparkled with the first kiss of morning sunlight. Awake had nothing to do with coffee.

When I rang her bell Tuesday morning, she was still in her robe and had indeed made breakfast for two. Over pancakes with strawberries and whipped cream we talked about me some, my study of the human animal, hoping to find a clue that will make the world a better place for all us interacting species happily eating each other. She talked a bit about growing up in Ontario, learning construction from her contractor father.

We had both picked up a sense of the importance of an artistic outlook combined with a professional competence, I call it a 'do it right with the ends and means created equal' mentality. She called it a 'use the shit to farm mushrooms' mentality. Then use the mushrooms to build castles.

We made a start at building our own playground in the

space between ourselves, where the real action is and the tigers all melt down into a big pool of butter.

The next year and a half was incredibly beautiful. We cut back the work hours to the bare minimum. Life was a ten-meter-high blender swirling chocolate-cherry-mint mousse all over our bodies faster than we could lick each other clean. Laughter was so common we had to keep going back over the script to see what had been so funny. Orgasms punctuated expeditions deep into the uncharted, sometimes forbidden regions of each other's psyches. In the afterglow, slow cuddling and talk brought us meandering back to the garden of civilization once again.

During that whole time the only interruptions were the construction noises that sometimes filtered in through the windows on warm days. And the occasional dust. The building was being renovated on the rear side. But it didn't concern me. I was lost in an elfland with the queen elf stroking my id and the sunshine and mink fur stroking the rest of me.

Working was a blur, driving fares and making enough to quit for the rest of the week. For her too, I assume, because she didn't stay out late, beyond the 2:00 AM closing hour of the pubs and clubs. I didn't make any suggestion that she should stop working or anything. A job's a job, after all, and I don't have anything against show business. She seemed happy, working and coming home after instead of going out partying with the guys who hang around that business.

We spent a lot of time just sitting around the apartment, watching each other work on our pet projects, studying, reading, writing. She did some martial arts along with her dancing, spent every morning working out, with a full set of Tai chi, some of the yoga stuff that ties your body in knots and some ballet moves that kept her limber and tight at the same time. She was good with her body, and proud of it. And she spent at least a few hours a day at the computer and the drafting table, revising and calculating and re-designing that damn building with the teeth. I watched over her and applauded and encouraged and generally kept the home fires roaring while she gave away every farm, all the animals and land and fences. But she kept the barn.

When I was younger, I'd thought any man who would hit a woman must be sub-human, some kind of degraded moron for whom a pit of black widow spiders would be a fitting reward. Chivalry in wonderland. That was before I wound up on the wrong end of flying claws and whirling books and plates and began to wonder how many wife beatings are fist-fights where the lady gets the worst of the exchange.

At first, I thought it was something I had done. And it was. But then it got more complicated. Eventually, it was for something she only thought I'd done. Then it got to be for things that were never explained, couldn't be explained, unexplainable. Somewhere out in the dark realm where the twister is still buffeting the house and the total immersion into Oz has not become possible because little Toto still has to be rescued before you can let your self slip over.

Somewhere out in the dark realm where the twister is still buffeting the house and the total immersion into Oz has not become possible because little Toto still has to be rescued before you can let your self slip over.

Once it was for talking to another woman who had a reputation for promiscuity. But I hadn't known. Another time I danced with someone who asked me. And then it began to be for some things I hadn't even thought. Something she had assumed I'd thought. How does one deal with that? Stop thinking, I suppose. The odds were piling up around my neck like anvils on silken threads, making a break for the surface less likely with every passing detail.

Broken bones, like old promises, can come back and haunt you in your old age, so I'm told. No person has the right to inflict damage on another person. For any reason. Or any emotion either. In any value system that's bound to be a worse sin than bombing a church or turning in your friends for smoking pot.

Now, it was happening again. And I loved her.

Fortunately there is always the open road. As the old song goes, "A woman gets the blues, she hangs her head and cries/ But when a man gets the blues, he grabs that old freight train and rides." Out is as close as a slab of wood.

There was a demon sitting on my shoulder blades, digging his claws in under my clavicles. It was shouting in both my ears, at the top of its wretched voice, "You blew it, buddy!! Now take your medicine and rescue what may be left of the little spark of self and sorrow that you have kept hidden way down in the lizard territory in the back of your skull and run like the wind."

I listened with dread and anticipation as crocodile tears blinked back into the wrinkles under my leaden brow.

The door closing softly behind my solitary butt was likely as close as I would ever get to wrestling down and torturing the secrets out of that particular shadow creature. One slap in the face is all that is allowed.

The hallway was different, though. I took two right turns to the elevator and . . . it wasn't there. Just more hallway and . . more doors.

Pretty soon I am back to her door. The elevator, which I eventually find, just goes across the intervening space between the floors. Neither up or down. It even says on a little metal plate on the inside of the door: "Neolevator." I thought it was a misprint at first.

I go around again. And again. There are stairs and I climb them to find, lo and behold, I am on the same floor and there is her door again. I try going up the stairs. Same thing. The M.C. Escher print hanging on the wall of the building foyer begins to make sense.

I find a window, and look out. There is a row of windows, stretching around the corner toward where the new construction is taking place. I can hear the sounds of jack hammers and a compressor. Her apartment is the one on the corner and I recognize the curtains. I look down at the slowly moebiusing building wall, stretching into itself and out toward the ground. Where it went around the other side is anybody's twisted guess.

There has to be some way out. Doesn't there?

☆

Unveiling the secret of GROTTO OF THE PARAPRAXIS

A Story by
Marilyn Iva Thomas

"If you feel you are being unjustly treated you are free to approach August Sophist Orant. However, Soma Blake-Mor, I must enter this protest on your performance record," Sophist Garner Boots said quietly. His sagging blue-grey face held neither censure nor sympathy as he waited patiently for the third-year sophister's response to the pointed yet mild attack on his character. It was a test. His small ears picked up Blake's sharp intake of breath.

"Why is it that you are allowing me to choose, Sophist Boots?" Blake-Mor's own small, newly-formed ears whipped forward in surprise. His honoured teacher appeared extraordinarily calm; as if what he had just said was commonplace. However, the pair of twitching, triple-jointed sense organs on the illustrious head indicated otherwise. There was nothing in the esteemed Sophist's bulging bluish face to indicate that this session would be different from any other. Still the singular words, never before spoken by his teacher, made Blake uneasy. He shifted his suddenly uncomfortable grey-green mid-section further back onto the worn bench and looked intently at the Premier Sophist on the other side of the massive desk.

"I have not been unjustly treated, Honourable One. You are above reproach. I have learned much from you. If my questions have injured you, such disrespect on my part must be recorded. I am willing to be reprimanded."

Sophist Boots' stubby fingers formed a pyramid. He turned his thick head to look directly at his prize sophister. Their eyes locked — fiery red with innocent sea-green — then the teacher leaned back in his padded chair and closed his penetrating, all-seeing eyes.

Blake was taken aback by this eccentric and rare action. He was curious as to why his teacher had broken contact with him since eye connection was very important in their learned society. Blake sighed lightly, somewhat forlornly. The sound whistled down the grooves in his sides creating an eddy of dust at his lower extremity.

Blake knew he stood out; that he was different from his contemporaries. As was his Sophist. Blake-Mor wanted to know things, unusual things, and his wonderfully sensitive master had welcomed his consuming interest in more than their own sphere. And tests came, unexpectedly, as this one. It was with just such curiosity that he puzzled why his question evoked such an unusual reaction in Sophist Boots. Blake respected Sophist Boots as he respected no other, not even Somata Gon-_Mor and Zab-_Mor, his devoted progenitors.

"Sophist Boots? Will you not answer?"

"Yes, progeny Blake, I will reply. A moment, please, while I collect my thoughts. What I must impart is of a grave nature." This said very softly, eyes closed, sense

Blake's swollen oral opening became slack and his thick black tongue trembled in the gallery behind his thin lips. He stared at his beloved teacher. It took him several seconds to speak.

organs quietly folded.

Blake-Mor's wiry dark-green eyebrows shot up at being addressed so casually, so familiarly, by the respected instructor. His own sense organs quivered strangely in response. Another whistling gasp escaped from the opening he used for speech. His parents were the only Paraprax who ever used his name in that delicate way.

"Have I offended you, Sophist Boots?"

"No, you have not. Far from it, sophister Blake," Sophist Garner Boots opened his mesmerizing eyes making contact with his student's once more. Leaning forward, the elderly Sophist held the sea-green eyes captive for what seemed an eternity. Blake-Mor could not tear his bewildered eyes away nor could he force the lids to cover them. He swallowed hard. His thick black tongue moved back and forth in his gallery without conscious thought. The fiery red eyes boring into his took his breath away, such was their intensity. He sensed something of great importance was about to be said, or learned, and he finally relaxed.

Perceiving it was now safe to proceed without using force, Sophist Boots continued, "You mean more to me than I could ever have imagined, Blake. I watched you come into existence and have watched your mental and physical growth eagerly. At those times I wished you for myself — to be my progeny — to bear my genes, my history, but that was not possible.

"There was something very appealing about your structure. I was aware of it from your embryonic stage and through the gestation. . ." the kindly old Paraprax paused, his eyes not leaving Blake's face. "I named you, you know. It is a name for the future . . . for your new life."

"But, sir . . . sir. My new life? How were you able . . . how could you . . .?" Blake could not find the right words.

"Please, Blake, let me continue." Sophist Boots leaned back. His ruby-red paramatta, shot through with gold and silver threads, floated up and gently, with a stubby wrinkled arm, he brought it back to caress his bulky body. He fingered the elegant garment and the shriveled members hidden beneath the robe undulated from neck to waist in an allusive display, causing Soma Blake-Mor's colour to rise and fall as the tide.

Blake's eyes widened in wonderment. He had never before seen Sophist Boots, any Sophist for that matter, lose control — if that was in fact what was happening. It was all so strange. Still, he could not tear his sea-green eyes away from Sophist Boots. After several minutes of strange silence, he became frightened and whispered hoarsely, "Premier Sophist Boots? Are you unwell?"

Sophist Boots stilled. He realized suddenly that his momentary lapse was upsetting to his treasured pupil. Despite his pressing need to be free, it took considerable effort to calm his excited nerves. Gasping for breath, he terminated the activity with incredible strength of will.

Blake-Mor had imperceptibly pulled back when Sophist Boots had indulged himself in his private display, alerting the young Paraprax sophister to something he had only heard whispered in dark corners of the school. So engrossed was Blake in the happenings beneath the ruby paramatta he forgot where he was thus when his teacher spoke, his slender body jerked upright in alarm.

"Blake? I am sorry for forgetting myself. You will have many questions I am sure but your patience is needed now. You will learn of this matter shortly. Other, more pressing matters must occupy your time right now."

"I apologize for gaping at you, Sophist Boots, but I had heard stories of such activities among the senior Sophists, spoken of in hushed whispers in unlit corridors. I thought it merely something the middle-class made up to tease graduating sophisters."

"No, Soma Blake-Mor, that which happens as we move along in life is very real — and very private. But as I said, I do not wish to advise you of this matter at the present time. I . . ." Sophist Garner Boots paused, considering his next words very carefully. ". . . I wish you to accompany me to the Grotto of the Parapraxis, Blake."

Blake's swollen oral opening became slack and his thick black tongue trembled in the gallery behind his thin lips. He stared at his beloved teacher. It took him several seconds to speak. "Sophist Boots! First I am told I may choose to speak with the August Sophist Orant. Now you are granting me the greatest of all privileges. Oh, how I have wanted to visit the Grotto."

Sophist Boots rose, lumbering around the desk to clasp one of Blake-Mor's willowy arms with his stumpy fingers. "Progeny Blake, there is much for me to show you but I cannot if you continue to linger on that bench. There is not much time. Will you come? Are you afraid?"

"Yes, Premier Sophist, I am greatly disturbed by the things of which you speak — and of the great honour I am being given. Of course, I will come. You have allowed me glimpses of things I thought of as fairy stories."

"When a Premier Sophist is fortunate enough to have a student of such calibre as you, Blake, there is no other choice than to transport them to the next level of awareness."

"I thought that . . ." Blake-Mor paused. He had been told by his parents that to be selected by the Sophist teachers for singular training was the most remarkable thing a Paraprax could do. He was amazed to discover there were other levels of comprehension as well. It was always spoken of in hushed tones by his parents and their friends. Even his best friend, his betrothed, Soma Simsu-Gaw and he had never discussed anything other than that with which they were familiar. He was excited and could not wait to return to his lodgings to tell Simsu of his marvelous day.

Soma Simsu-Gaw had often told him how unhappy she was with her own teacher, Premier Sophist Gepor-Bee; he showed no interest in her advancement although she had been chosen by the August Sophist Orant to study under the renown Gepor-Bee. Wise Sophist Orant knew Simsu-Gaw's perceptions to be far above normal; he also knew that she needed to reach out and pursue. A catalyst was required — and he saw Gepor-Bee's abrasive methods as that catalyst.

Blake felt an unmistakable sting of sorrow. Learning under

A smile tugged at the corners of his speech aperture and softened the stern black and yellow stripes surrounding it

the grating Sophist Gepor-Bee was fast becoming difficult for his love, but he felt that they would be happy once their training was complete and their futures known. He encouraged her to continue with her studies despite the faulty teaching abilities of her Sophist.

"You thought what . . . ?" Sophist Boots prodded, looking warmly at his student. He towered over Blake, but his huge size did not intimidate. He was the gentlest of Paraprax. Also generous and exceedingly kind, not at all like the others entitled to be called Premier Sophists.

"It was nothing, sir," Blake-Mor apologized. His body quivered with excitement as a question formed in his mind. "Teacher?"

"Yes?"

"Why am I so honoured?"

"Patience, Blake-Mor, you will know all that there is to know very shortly," he said then asked breathlessly. "Will you come with me now?"

Soma Blake-Mor nodded. He could not speak as the implication of the request sank in. Another honour was being bestowed on him!

"It is good to find one so young so amenable to an old fellow," Sophist Boots chuckled. He shuffled his massive bulk along the corridors to the shoots, his magnificent paramatta lifting and falling gracefully with each laboured footfall. Once on the moving pathway, however, his breathing eased and he began to hum softly. A smile tugged at the corners of his speech aperture and softened the stern black and yellow stripes surrounding it.

"You are very happy at this moment, are you not, Teacher?" Blake looked up at his mentor and was shocked by the sudden rush of intense love he felt for his kindly, wise instructor.

"I am very happy, Sophister Soma Blake-Mor; very happy indeed that you have come with me. You could have chosen not to."

"I . . . I . . . could have chosen not to?"

"You are here, are you not?"

"I am, master, therefore I did choose to follow you and for that I will be forever honoured. But if I may say, Honourable One, that I wish with all my heart that my betrothed, Soma Simsu-Gaw could share these wonderful moments with me . . . with us."

"Perhaps so. She is prime sophister under Premier Sophist Gepor-Bee, is she not?"

"Yes, master." Blake felt the familiar heaviness sweep over him.

"There is sadness in your voice. Why?"

"Her sophist is not as you. He lacks compassion and is very stern. He never smiles and Simsu-Gaw often weeps in frustration and pain at the end of the day."

"She is learning is she not, Soma Blake-Mor?" Sophist Boots asked softly, reasonably.

"Yes, she learns but at what cost, Master?" Blake sighed, his shoulders drooped.

"What is it that I might do?" Sophist Boots asked, compassion evident in his utterance.

"Will you not call for her? Will you not ask August Sophist Orant to allow her to accompany us?"

"You think I am able to do this?" Sophist Boots stopped, leaning his massive bulk against the wall. His breathing was very laboured and came in short gasps. He looked very tired.

"You are able to do what no other Sophist, except Sophist Orant may do. I know he will listen to you and it would give Soma Simsu-Gaw the greatest of joys to accompany us on this journey."

Sophist Boots nodded and placed his hand on Blake's strong young shoulder. They continued without speaking and soon arrived at the post-point marking the entrance to the Grotto. The attendants at the door stood erect but their eyes held a question when they saw the slender Soma trudging beside the well-known and beloved, Premier Sophist Garner Boots. Had they moved, however, they would have been immediately exterminated. Their position as guards of the Grotto of the Parapraxis was an honourable one as well as a very serious one, and not to be taken lightly. So it was then that they quivered in surprise when the old teacher addressed the third-year sophister so informally. It was unheard of!

"You are in for a treat, Blake." Sophist Boots looked closely into the eyes of the guards, warning them without words to keep absolutely still. "And I will summon your betrothed to join us."

Blake was beside himself with joy. He quivered, watching silently as Sophist Boots stubby fingers poked at the keypad beside the heavy copper-clad doors. They opened with a swish, and the old instructor and his trainee stepped through the portal. The doors gently swished closed behind them effectively shutting out the rest of the colony.

Blake gasped in delight. They were on a high promontory jutting into the glittering lavender waters of the Grotto. The walls were crystalline in nature and the Grotto was immense with a rainbow of sparking lights shimmering from everywhere. He could not pinpoint the source of the lights as being above him or below him — all he knew was that it filled him, consumed him; swirled inside him like nothing he had ever experienced before. It lifted him from within and transported him around the space without his ever leaving his body. The sensations of lightness, of joy, of immense pleasure, trickled up and down his languid body, slowed to a whisper, then rampaged again. He was helpless to prevent it. He reached out and grabbed one of Sophist Boots thick arms and squeezed it tightly, fingers locked in a death-

grip.

"Oh, Master, what is it? What is happening to me?"

"It is as I promised. You have proven to be unique among the Paraprax. You have not failed to respond to whatever you have been shown. But best of all, you have not been afraid to question me, your superior, nor to express your desire to make choices."

"I could not perceive of not questioning your great learning, Sophist Boots. You have encouraged me greatly to test you out; to choose."

Helplessly, Blake looked around for his teacher but saw instead his betrothed. He stretched out his arms to her and she came forward, as awestruck as he at their surroundings and the changes occurring to their bodies.

"I have done so, Blake. And I have willingly allowed you to delve deeper into the Parapraxian heritage than anyone has done before. Do you wish to see more?"

"More, my Lord Boots? There is more than this? Of that I cannot conceive as this is what I have dreamt of all my life! But I do not see my beloved Simsu-Gaw."

"That is because you have not looked. She is here." The old master chuckled. "Walk with me a little further." The teacher seemed to gain momentum, seemed to be standing without difficulty now; his breathing quiet and deep. He drifted upward, his ruby-red paramatta billowing out around him like a frothy cloud of purest silk.

Up, up, up, he soared, leaving Soma Blake-Mor to watch, wide-eyed, taking in the beauty of Sophist Boots' heavy body as it sailed effortlessly in the misty rainbow of colours that filled the Grotto. Blake felt strange, as if someone had unzipped his skin along his back. The sensation took his breath away.

Helplessly, Blake looked around for his teacher but saw instead his betrothed. He stretched out his arms to her and she came forward, as awestruck as he at their surroundings and the changes occurring to their bodies. Before Blake-Mor could address Simsu-Gaw, a keening cry emerged from the kaleidoscope of swirling mist and startled them.

"Teacher? Teacher? Where are you?" Blake-Mor cried out in alarm.

"Easiness be upon you, progeny Blake. I am here. I am free."

"Free, Sophist Boots?"

"Will you not join me, sophisters?"

"I will, Instructor, if you tell me where you are," Soma Simsu-Gaw declared. She took Blake's hand in her own, clasped it tightly. "We must go to him, beloved."

"Lift yourselves up," Sophist Boots ordered softly, "and come this way. Come to freedom."

Blake looked up and this time his body lifted, his own paramatta floated out around his changing form and blended with Simsu-Gaw's brilliant gown. He felt his skin shrink away as he became lighter, ever lighter. His plain blue paramatta changed before his eyes and stunned him. The same amazing transformation was happening to Simsu's body and garment as well. If he thought her beautiful before, she was extraordinarily lovely now. Her paramatta shimmered, became a gossamer with an iridescence hitherto unknown to any in the colony or mentioned in any fairy story.

"Sophist Boots!" Blake wailed, not in terror, but in understanding of the metamorphosis. His robe had become shimmering aqua and gold wings, his body was no longer encased in the tough skin he had grown to accept — but hate. He no longer had stubs for arms and legs.

Blake felt a gentle touch at his shoulder. He looked around expecting to see his Instructor, instead he saw only what Sophist Boots had become. Tears glistened in his beautiful sea-green eyes. There before him hovered the most wondrous creature he had ever seen or thought to see.

"You are free now, Blake. You are no longer a sophister or a Somata. You are now a Parapraxis, and I am no longer an old, worn Premier Sophist. You are changed forever, as am I. Above us there is an opening through which we will venture."

"I do not regret the change, Soph . . ." Blake paused, remembering what he had just been told. "What are you now called?"

"I am called Autonomy."

"Autonomy? The word is very strange," Blake murmured softly. "What does it mean?"

"Freedom." Sophist Boots moved his wings upward and soared away from his young student, no longer saddled with the ugly and cumbersome body which was finally shed with effort and purpose.

"What does my name mean?" Blake called, his new voice strong, triumphant; filled with promise as he held tightly to Simsu.

"Poet and artist. Bold of beauty and of rhyme," sang Autonomy, "ever questioning throughout time."

Simsu and Blake looked deeply into each other's sparkling sea-green eyes as the mists of time swirled about them, lifting their multicoloured garments on the softly scented air.

"And what of Simsu? What is she to be called?" Blake whispered in wonderment, his quiet questions carried on the willowy winds to nowhere. Autonomy was no longer present.

"Infinity, is what I shall be called," Simsu whispered. "You will speak of great love, Blake, and I shall carry it throughout eternity."

☆ ☆ ☆

Where they went, the sands of time are keeping to themselves. Rumours of the young Somas, Blake-Mor and Simsu-Gaw abound in a dutiful world left behind when speaking of the Grotto of the Parapraxis, but no questions are asked.

And what of Autonomy, Blake and Infinity?

Limits were cast off, easily shed like their unyielding, confining skins, allowing limitless freedom of movement within themselves — and within the universe — their whereabouts not as important as their journeys.

☆

STUCK IN A POCKET OF EVIL

FUTURE EVIL

A Story by
David Shtogryn

Greg smelled their presence in the air. The hint of rancid flesh scarcely tainted the oppressive humidity, but it was enough to warn him the time to move had come again.

Slipping his knapsack over his shoulders and ensuring his boning knife was tucked into its sheath on his belt, he crawled to the opening of the cave. The forest below spread out silently in the early morning, the sun just edging above the horizon.

He stepped down the shallow ridge that held the cave and turned to the west. Aware that it wasn't possible to shake them from their tenacious pursuit he made no effort to cover his tracks. Why didn't they just take him and stop this game? Surely, they couldn't be as slow as they appeared. Or did they only want him to quit running, to give up and allow them their tormenting pleasure? Greg shuddered at the thought, but more so at his fading resolve.

He slipped the compass out of his shirt pocket and checked the bearing. If he continued to move in a single direction, he felt he'd eventually find some sign of civilization. This aberration of a land couldn't possibly go on forever.

An indeterminate time ago, two or three days at least, Howard had spotted the narrow inlet. "May be good fishin' in there," he'd said. "Whatcha think, Greg?"

"Could be."

Greg adjusted the engine speed of the small cruiser to idle and peered over the wind screen to get a clearer view. A blurry mist hung over the entrance of a channel. Dark waters cut a narrow gap through a mass of giant oaks, their branches forming a dense ceiling overhead.

"Never seen that before," Greg said.

"Nope." Howard replied. "And we've been by this spot lots of times."

Greg shivered against a cool breeze. A warning bell sounded faintly in his mind.

"Well, we ain't catchin' any fish here," Howard said, looking back at Greg from his perch on the bow.

"That's for sure. May as well try it."

Greg turned the throttle up slightly. The smooth sound of the engine sputtered as they hit resistance in the thin fog. The front of the cruiser lifted slightly as if trying to escape the clutches of a rear anchor, and then, suddenly released it began to slice forward. They broke through the fog and entered a tight channel.

"Back up!" Howard gagged as a fetid stench assaulted them. "Fuckin' awful in here!"

Eyes tearing, Greg slammed the motor into reverse. It coughed and stalled. The cruiser inexplicably began to

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accelerate forward. The sharp bow cut through the water sending rising eddies to splash against the close banks.

Greg tightly clenched the steering wheel and tried to catch his breath in suddenly hot and damp air. The cruiser sped out of the channel and into a small lake of black water. Forward motion instantly halted and he heard a thud.

Howard screamed.

Greg whirled around to see Howard struggling against a vine, twisted around his neck and lifting him up toward the branch of a giant oak.

"Fuck!" Greg yelled, dashing to grab Howard's kicking legs.

The boat rocked as he leaped. His reaching fingers scraped the treaded bottom of one of Howard's shoes. Greg then fell back. His leg caught the side of the cruiser and he toppled into the water. He quickly managed to grasp the edge of the boat and look up. Howard had ceased struggling and was being slowly reeled up into the tree.

"Howard!" Greg shouted.

Greg caught a glimpse of something gray, indiscernible in the dense tree top. It may have been some kind of an animal. Howard's legs were the last thing he saw of his friend, inexorably moving upwards. A snapping of branches stopped. Several leaves gently floated down. The horrid stench and steamy air dissipated.

"Oh, Howard! Oh fuck!"

He pulled himself out of the tepid water causing the boat to bump against a low, muddy bank. As he looked back at the water, several sharp fins cut through the glassy surface carving paths away from the boat.

"Howard!" he called again.This time he heard his own voice echo back, lonely and haunting.

Gazing again into the tree, he hoped for something, anything to indicate life. Only silence answered the fading echo of his frantic call.

He looked for the channel that brought them here. It should be there, close to the towering oak that had taken Howard. All he could see was the uneven bank of the lake and the impenetrable, bordering forest.

Perhaps he erred, and the boat had floated some distance from the opening. Greg started the engine. It faltered briefly before settling into a smooth hum. He cautiously negotiated the boat, keeping several feet away from the

shore line. The water appeared deep enough, but he tentatively steered away from any overhanging branches.

"Greg!"

Howard's voice then was punctuated by a series of echoes. Where! A shape stood at the edge of the lake on the far side, waving.

Greg turned the boat to point at the distant figure and jammed the throttle up full. Yes, Howard was signaling with both hands, beckoning. Then Howard stepped back and vanished into the forest.

"No!" Greg whispered. "What the hell is this all about?"

He slowed, then gently reversed the engine as he approached the spot where Howard had stood. With the boat's speed under control he jammed the motor into neutral. The bow of the cruiser snuggled onto a narrow, sandy beach. Howard's footprints marked the sand.

"Where are you, Howard?" Greg called.

The cruiser slowly bobbed sideways and made its way to the end of the beach. All the while Greg stared into the dense brush as if trying to burn a hole through it.

Okay, Howard, he thought, grabbing his knapsack from the storage panel under the front seat. His mind rambled on. I'm coming to have a look. I can't stay in the boat on this lake forever. Besides, I seem to have misplaced both you and the way out!

He tossed the knapsack onto the shore, grasped the bow line and jumped. Fortunately the slope was gradual and the footing secure. After wading out of the water, he set the cruiser's bow in the sand and secured it with the line to a sturdy tree. The stern slowly began to swing around in a clockwise direction. For a second, he thought he might attach the stern line as well, but decided that if a storm should hit, the cruiser would be flattened anyway. A beach cannot be considered a safe dock regardless of how many lines were secured, so why waste the time?

Retrieving his knapsack, he shrugged his arms through its straps and fastened the clip. Then he strode over to Howard's footprints. If anyone was watching, he wanted to appear calm and fearless.

"So!"

Greg bellowed in shock. He whirled around. A woman, jet black hair tumbling over shoulders clad in green, towered above him.

"So!" she repeated, her dark eyes crackling, "it's like I thought. Humanity was sleaze even then." She hesitated. "Your friend, and I use that word in its most derogatory form, drew you here to save his own skin."

Greg opened his mouth to speak.

"A little experiment," she continued. "Just to prove what I've always thought."

"Who are you?"

"Me?"

"What do you want?"

"Life for me," she replied. "And death for you, though the latter may be negotiable."

"May be negotiable? That means there are conditions."

Greg reached around his back and felt for the lower compartment of his knapsack. He hoped his boning knife was in easy reach. If he could get it, and brandish it as a weapon, he might improve his bargaining position. The mere size of her told him she didn't need any other advantage.

She gazed at him scornfully. "It would be wise for you to keep your hands where I can see them," she said. "You may consider that condition number one."

There is not and never has been, nor ever will be worse. For the sake of a name, you may call me Hyades.

His fingers grazed the handle of the knife through the sack's nylon material.

"It appears you're not listening." She took a step toward him.

"Okay, okay." He held his hands out in front of him. "You didn't tell me who you are." Co-operation appeared to be his only option for the moment.

"Me?" She smiled showing white teeth and distinctly long canines.

Greg felt ice crawl up his spine.

"I am," she continued, her voice taking on a superior tone, "the epitome of evil. There is not and never has been, nor ever will be worse. For the sake of a name, you may call me Hyades." She chuckled. "And I'll call you Greg."

If that was her attempt at humor, Greg felt she had fallen very short. As he tried to buy time to sort out his scrambled mind, he silently studied her. The clothing clung to her body in one piece from sleeveless arms to legs stopping just inches above her knees. Her feet were bare and the toenails long. Muscles softly pressed out against her olive skin. She didn't have a body builder's physique, but it was close.

"Had a good look?" she jolted him back. "I think you can hand me that pack of yours, then I suggest you come with me without any squawking."

"I don't think so," he replied. "I think I'm going to get back on my boat and get out of here."

"And your friend?"

"He can fend for himself."

Hyades eyes gleamed. She licked her lips, moistening them succulently. Her tongue, oversized and heavily cratered, glistened a perverse pink. In a surprise, lightning move she clutched Greg by the side of his neck with her right hand and dug her long fingernails into his skin.

Searing pain exploded through his body as he was forced to his knees. Then she had him by the hair, jerking him up and leading him off the beach. They thrashed through the bush as if walking across a barren field. Greg felt behind his back for the knapsack she had obviously forgotten about.

"You must think I'm really stupid," she grumbled, as she whirled him around and slammed her knee into his face.

He felt his nose crack and fought against threatening blackness.

"Whatever you got in that bag won't do you much good. So you may as well continue to carry it. I've got my hands full at the moment."

Hyades yanked him up again, then slammed his head into

something metallic. She tightened her grip in his hair and spun him around, throwing him into a bed of moss.

Blood dripped from Greg's nose as he lifted himself to his hands and knees. The bright red dots enhanced the green of the moss. He barely moved while Hyades undid the knapsack clip at his waist. She twisted his left arm back and as he struggled for balance, and removed the sack's belt. Repeating the same maneuver with the other arm, she now dangled the knapsack in front of him.

Greg had only enough sense left to push himself to a sitting position. He carefully applied pressure to his flattened nose in an effort to stop the bleeding. Through the pain and his tearing eyes, he began to look at his surroundings.

A lush forest bordered a small, circular oasis. The pattern was broken by a smooth bulge of gleaming metal, towering high above his head and extending wide to either side. The encroaching foliage gave the impression of restraining the massive object.

Something else caught his attention. Through his blurred vision, he could see a structure vaguely resembling a gallows. Not wanting to release the pressure from his nose yet, Greg wiped his eyes with his free hand and blinked away the moisture. He gasped at the sight of a headless body, hanging upside down from the extended arm of the gallows. Even at this distance he recognized Howard's camouflage pants. A large, brownish receptacle lay on the ground under Howard's neck.

Greg heard Hyades, breathing rapidly as she hovered above him. Suddenly he thought of Howard's family and their loss. Anger raged through his body.

He gasped at the sight of a headless body, hanging upside down from the extended arm of the gallows. Even at this distance he recognized Howard's camouflage pants. A large, brownish receptacle lay on the ground under Howard's neck.

"You fucking bitch!" he screamed and rose to his feet, only to be pushed down again.

"Bitch! How could you do this! What the fuck are you anyway?"

"I didn't do that," she replied.

"Why? He has family! Why? I've only got an ex-wife whose going to clean up on my shit!"

"My pets did that," she said. "Sometimes they're real sweethearts, but they do stink."

Greg's energy dissipated like the air escaping from a punctured balloon. He told himself to regroup, to think. His own corpse replacing Howard's was not a desirable option. Cursing under his breath, his dwindling fury focused on an inane nonessential, an oversight regarding his ex-wife. He'd intended to change beneficiaries in his will and insurance policies when he and Howard returned from their fishing trip.

"Fuck!" he yelled. "She's going to get everything!"

Funny, he thought, for that one crazed moment his ex-wife's greed bothered him more than his own impending death.

"You said, back at the beach," he looked up at Hyades, "that my life or death is negotiable."

Hyades laughed. "You think after the hard time you've given me, that I'd even leave the offer on the table?"

"So your offer's no good! Your word's no good!"

"We'll see," she said.

Hyades produced a roll of silver thread from somewhere behind her back.

Greg had no resistance left as she wound it around him, pinning his arms to his sides and his legs together. She lifted him up as if he was a child and carried him to the metallic wall. She propped him up against it and walked the distance to Howard's body. There, she dropped to her hands and knees. Her head disappeared into the large bowl under Howard's neck.

In the deathly silence he could hear slurping and the occasional crunch. He gagged as he realized she was eating Howard's partially congealed blood. Full realization struck him that there would be no compromise here, no negotiations. At least nothing permanent.

Finally the horrid sounds of her feasting stopped and she stood up. A brief glimpse at Howard's headless corpse, and she wheeled around and trotted back to Greg. Her tongue worked wonders, cleaning her face as she approached. With incredible ease, she picked Greg up again.

"There," she said. "Can you smell that?"

"Uh," he grunted. The air was slowly

filling with that rancid, fleshy stench. Oppressive, muggy heat returned.

From his position in her arms, Greg could see her eyes scan the far tree line. He heard snapping sounds like small branches, breaking under heavy foot steps.

"My babies," she sighed. "Here! Here I am! I'm okay!"

Hyades shifted him up and turned so he could see better.

"There," she whispered. "They're just checking on me!"

Greg could make out two, pulpy, gray masses. Any detail remained obscured by distance.

"I brought them with me, to keep me company while I did my studies," she said as if she were speaking to herself. "But something changed them . . . affected their molecular structure when the ship malfunctioned in the warp. They were such cute little things. Now look at them. And they stink so much, even I can't stand it. They know, so they stay their distance, leaving presents every once in a while."

Greg filed the confusing information in the back of his mind. Hopefully it, combined with whatever else he could learn, would help him buy an escape ticket. Right now, his bladder threatened to explode.

"Do you vampires ever have to pee?" he asked.

She winced.

"I've really got to go. If it's not beyond you to allow me some dignity."

Hyades set him on the ground and with a twist of her wrist, the binding threads loosened. He now had some limited movement with his arms and legs.

"Well?" She stood with her hands planted on her hips.

With some difficulty he was able to stand up. He glanced around and saw that her pets hadn't moved.

"I just have to go by the woods." He hobbled slowly to the closest brush, where the metal barrier curved into the woods.

Greg heard Hyades breathing, close behind him.

"Privacy?" he asked.

"Forget it."

Barely in time, he zipped down his fly and emptied his protesting bladder. He'd scarcely finished, when the threads snapped tight around him again. Hyades swept him into her arms before he could topple over. She turned and faced the gleaming wall. A large oval suddenly marked the smooth skin and a portal opened. One step, and they were inside.

Greg gasped for breath. He realized they were now inside a space craft of some sort. But it wasn't like anything he'd ever imagined. No flashing lights covered the walls, no central global sphere, no control panel. Only a single, silver-gray chair rested in the center of a miniature dome. The chair was broad and deeply cushioned for maximum comfort. The hemispheric enclosure undulated green, in varying, changing patterns and shades.

Greg filed the confusing information in the back of his mind. Hopefully it, combined with whatever else he could learn, would help him buy an escape ticket. Right now, his bladder threatened to explode.

Hyades deposited him by the doorway that had soundlessly closed, its presence now an unseen part of the rolling wall. He squirmed to a sitting position. He felt a gentle warmth comfort as he leaned back.

He watched as Hyades settled in the central chair. The upholstery shaped itself to her body and the chair tilted to raise her legs to a comfortable level.

She gazed at the ceiling and sighed. "Well," she spoke in a quiet, almost forlorn tone. "This is Hyades filing."

The waving tones of the dome increased slightly. Greg's fear for his situation became displaced by absolute wonder at what he was witnessing.

She continued speaking. "As you may suspect, I am still here. I've managed to capture a hominoid male. My pets were busy with his partner and allowed me the opportunity. I've confirmed that betrayal is a part of the hominoid nature. Allowing for individual variances, I suspect we can log that characteristic as definitive.

"The pets are becoming more aggressive. They still do want to please me, and did co-operate with the initial test of betrayal, but I can barely control them now. After this incident, the mutilation of the first hominoid, I will carry a weapon when I go outside. Their sluggishness is a disadvantage for them, but, this too, may change.

"I hope to keep this second hominoid around for company, and experimentation while I continue to await Chelsea in Vibra Four."

Horrible shudders chilled Greg's body at the word experimentation. He wasn't sure if he really wanted to hear any more of her report.

Her voice droned on. "Chelsea did not confirm receipt of my distress signal, but I can only continue to hope. The communication system has failed and I haven't been able to send other signals. And, oh yes, something else to note. The male captive referred to me as a vampire. That disparaging term caught me off guard for a moment until I realized the date of my location. As usual, this report has been filed in the archives secure memory section."

Hyades swung out of the chair and walked over to Greg. She appeared indecisive.

He met her gaze confidently, but he knew it was false bravado.

"Just who are you?" he asked. "Where are you from?"

"You called me a vampire! Why?"

"That's what you are! Aren't you? Drinking blood! Long canines!"

"The term vampire is no longer part of our language. I don't appreciate that term, so don't use it."

"Listen!" Greg shouted. "I've had enough of this shit. Kill me now and get it over with. And I'll call you anything I fucking well please! If you think I'm going to be a part of any experimentation, you can fucking forget it. And you can fucking well forget any cooperation in a bargain for my freedom. Vampire!"

"Yes, that's what we were once called by hominoids like you. We evolved and inherited the earth. Isn't that an old hominoid expression? Your kind is extinct."

She leaned over, bringing her face close to his. "You're gone, all of you."

Greg would have spit at her, but his mouth was too dry. He smelled blood on her breath.

"We!" She showed off her fangs. "We are the ones who went to the stars. We colonized the planets, and eventually moved to other galaxies. How do I know

this? Because I'm from the future, which, for your species, is nonexistent."

Hyades grabbed him by the hair and twisted his head, exposing his neck. He felt her teeth touch his skin.

A soft breeze grazed his back. Heat and fetor filled the room. He gagged at the same instant Hyades released him.

She reeled away from the opened entrance.

"Babies," she cried. "How did you get in here? You're not allowed."

A deep growl thundered in response.

Greg turned to see a giant shape enter the interior of the craft, barely squeezing through the doorway. A second figure trailed close behind. They reminded Greg of huge, incomplete felines.

"Out!" Hyades ordered. "You don't have permission! Either of you!"

Though incredibly sluggish, the creatures had backed Hyades against the curving wall. Their size alone closed any escape route for her.

She shrieked, long and loud.

Greg heard a sound like bones snapping. The silver thread tying him fell off his body as if Hyades' control over them had been switched off.

Greg scrambled out the entrance.

He maintained enough presence of mind to gather up his knapsack up as he ran by it. He rushed across the clearing. Suddenly realizing he was headed straight for Howard's body, he veered, then fell sprawling as his foot struck something. With the knapsack still clutched tightly in his hand, he clambered to his feet and looked down. Lifeless eyes stared back at him as Howard's head stopped rolling from the impact with Greg's foot.

Greg howled, then tore off in the direction of the closest section of forest. He didn't know how long he ran like an insane man. When he finally stopped, his body screaming for rest, he couldn't smell the creatures and the air was dry.

The pattern went on for hours, for days, Greg couldn't tell. Keeping track of such things didn't appear on his priority list. He'd run out of trail mix and granola bars on the same day he'd found the cave. The small container of water gave up its last drop at the same time.

The emergency contents of his knapsack had come in handy, though he could never have imagined these circumstances in which he'd needed them. Thinking he might be able to see the pursuing creatures from this elevation, he took shelter in this shallow, rock chamber. Reaching the end of his strength, physical and emotional, Greg became complacent. He spent the night, sleeping in the cave, knowing it could be a death trap.

But this morning, when he could again smell their presence, Greg pressed on, westerly by his compass. Perhaps the forest might give up some berries or mushrooms to help sustain him. Though the season was wrong for the fungi and plants, Greg felt anything could be possible in this godforsaken place.

He easily slid down the elevation and re-entered the woods. He traveled the forest floor effortlessly, with only low undergrowth and a thick covering of leaves beneath his feet. He frequently checked his compass and occasionally adjusted his direction.

The smell of pursuit clung in the air, and he wondered if the creatures had jumped into another stage of their development. Had they become faster?

When the sun reached its midday level, Greg stopped, his energy drained. He had found nothing to sustain him.

Slowly as he rested, his back against a large tree trunk, the incredible smell and heat rolled over him like a slow moving fog. This was it. The long delayed finale. He clutched the boning knife tightly and stood up.

A cool motion in the air suddenly carried away the stench. He stepped away from the tree and looked around. There! A sparkling of water glistened through the brush. Abandoning his knapsack, he ran toward the water. Pointing the knife ahead, like a miniature spear, he let a warlike whoop escape his parched lips.

Greg broke through the woods and almost slammed into the side of his boat. His excitement vanished instantly when he saw a huge, multicolored cat, sprawled out on the top of the cruiser's bow. The creature looked at him and yawned. Its treacherous fangs sparkled in the sunlight. Another cat sat on its haunches in the sand.

He quickly realized these were Hyades' pets, evolved into their true and probably final shape. Greg tossed his knife to the ground. He wouldn't fight.

The deep green eyes of the sitting cat regarded Greg with a minimal sign of interest. Greg stared back, challenging. He felt his vision trapped in the eyes of the cat. He couldn't blink or turn away. A whirlpool of images stormed through his mind. He saw women and men with elongated canines moving caged feline cubs into numerous space craft. Hyades appeared inside her dome, sending a distress signal Greg now knew had never reached its intended audience. The two cubs, in the background of the vision, were altering shapes blurring into indiscernible forms. He unwillingly entered their minds and understood the ravages of their transformation and the uncontrollable rage that led them to slaughter Howard without thought or conscience. But that wildness passed the minute they crushed the life out of Hyades.

Dizziness swamped Greg as the existing reality returned to him. He knelt on the sand to keep from toppling over.

Greg now knew what he must do. Hyades and the cats had shown him a terrible future. It was up to him to prevent that future from happening. A plan began to simmer in his mind.

He blinked at the elegant movement of the feline from the boat as it leaped to the sand. Greg smiled as his vertigo ceased. He untied the bow line from the tree and in a single movement pushed the boat away from the shore as he climbed over its side.

The lost passageway reopened under the oak that Howard had disappeared into such a long while ago. Greg started the boat's engine and steered into the narrow channel. He glanced back, but the cats were gone. The air popped behind his back, and he knew the passage would now remain forever closed.

Greg abandoned the boat on the lake where he and Howard had been fishing. In time, he knew, the authorities would give up the search for their bodies and a tale of mystery would grow into a tale of a curse.

Many problems faced Greg in the immediate future, but none he couldn't solve. Money and a new identity would be the first, but not the most difficult. He had a war to start, here and now, while the vampires still existed only in small, hidden and scattered pockets.

He wouldn't stop until he found and destroyed them all. Most people would call him a nut case. But help would come from other lunatics like him. He knew they existed.

☆

The itsy-bitsy short story contest: Part II

Stargazing

I look into the sky for simplicity. It's a suburban sky, mercury-vapour streetlights spreading amber haze through the atmosphere. Air pollution shields the fainter stars and asterisms like the Little Dipper. That sky I know.

You've led me to the forest – I've followed willingly, even guiding us to a large clearing surrounded by charred trees. I brought my star-finder and you brought your binoculars. While you point at blotchy Andromeda, I tremble at the black sky.

Deep black. Points of light that don't tremble, that would be points of light even if my eyes were in Hubble. I can't find Polaris. I close my eyes and sit down.

You nudge me with your foot. "We should buy a telescope." I shake my head at how eyes work.

"Don't you want to see?" you ask.

"Where's Cassiopeia?" I whisper. ¶ I can't believe you laugh.

Helen Siourbas
Broussard, Quebec

He stared at my face as if he knew me. I dropped my weapon and turned quickly. He chased me to the window where I then jumped through the glass and as I fell, one shard stabbed my arm. I bled something awful, but I did not scream. No, there was no time for screaming. George Robinson had stolen an artifact of biological proportions. He shot at me. Gun blazing, he jumped after me. But he doesn't have wings too. Oh sorry, My name is Galambi. I am an angel.

Adam Pietrykowski
Huntingdon, Quebec

I FIRST SAW THE BEING UNDERNEATH THE ~~Gothic STRUCTURAL SUPPORTS of the~~ CARTIER BRIDGE. IT WAS LIKE THE ~~LARGEST~~ BAT IN THE WORLD. WHEN I NOTICED ITS ~~EYE OBSERVING~~ ME I KNEW IT WASN'T ~~BLIND~~ SURELY, IT WASN'T OBSERVING ME FOR A MEAL, A BLOODY MEAL. I COULDN'T TAKE MY EYES AWAY.

MEMORIES OF PREVIOUS ENCOUNTERS FLOODED MY MIND AND I KNEW HER FOR A FRIEND. I KNEW INSTANTLY SHE HAD FAILED IN HER QUEST.

Patrick Pietrykowski
Huntingdon, Quebec

Peter Watts
Author learns value of disgust

In Starfish, Toronto author Peter Watts presents the adventures of a group of volunteers who are helping the corporate world exploit geothermal resources found in the Juan de Fuca rift miles below the surface of the ocean.

The volunteers have been surgically altered so that they can handle the stress of working so deep in the ocean — the problem is the alteration makes them a wee bit psychotic.

And their stability is crucial if the world is survive an impending disaster.

For his first novel, which was among a handful of Canadian novels launched at a Toronto ceremony last month, Watts went to familiar territory.

Watt's background is in marine biology (physiological ecology of marine mammals to be precise).

For almost as long as he has wanted to be a marine biologist, he's wanted to be a writer. By his own reckoning, the decision to follow the cause of science was a close one.

"It occurred to me as I grew up that there were lots of successful writers who didn't have arts degrees, but there were no successful scientists who didn't have science degrees: going into science kept my options open," he explained. "At least, I thought it would: but try getting a job with a doctorate in the physiological ecology of marine mammals these days."

As a child, Watts was a full-fledged plagiarist.

He had copied a CBC radio presentation of 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea and by the age of nine he was writing fake National Geographic articles.

"At some point, I realized that the stuff I could invent was better than the stuff I was ripping off, so I switched."

When he got older, Watts sent off short stories to such publications as Analog.

In the case of Analog, Watts initially received an encouraging rejection from its editor.

But over the course of a number of submissions, the rejections became less personalized until, with a short story, A Niche, he received his first form letter.

A Niche has since been published by other sci-fi publications. It was its sale to Tesseracts 3 which kept Watts writing. With nothing but rejection letters coming in the mail, Watts had told a friend he was quitting.

Less than 24 hours later, he received a letter from the publishers of the Canadian anthology.

"Of course, I blew the whole advance on a couple of celebratory spring rolls," Watts joked. "But at least it taught me the value of giving up in disgust.

"Nothing good ever happens until you give up in disgust."

A Niche served as a premise for Starfish and set some of the parametres for the novel. The short story also provided Watts with an opportunity.

"If you look at A Niche, it's pretty much pure set-up: alpha and beta characters, thrown into a stressful environment, switch places," Watts explains. "The same things that make Lenie Clarke a loser on the surface, make her one tough mother at 3,000 metres."

Writing has also provided Watts with the opportunity to explore some scientific ideas in ways research papers or essays don't allow.

Indeed, the time he has spent in the academic world became a key component in the novel.

Over the years, Watts came to the realization that dysfunction and accomplishment were co-dependent.

Toronto author Peter Watts put his time in academia — with its paranoia and seige mentalities — to good use in his novel, Starfish.

"You run into this a lot in academia: people driven by siege mentalities, paranoia, the pathological need to prove themselves to judgmental parents.

"It's a powerful battery," he explained.

"Who's going to be more dedicated to the job: the well-adjusted scientist who spends her weekends with her family, or the chain-smoking insomniac who works around the clock because of some desperate fear of failure?"

And such driven people form the core of Starfish — dysfunctional people upon whom the rest of civilization depends. Pretty much as it does in the real world.

☆

Next Issue:
Sean Stewart,
Yvonne Navarro,
Alison Baird,
Elisabeth Vonarburg
parsec.on.ca

Shakespeare line at heart of Duncan tale

A line from Henry VIII got the Alberta-based writer thinking and from there came The Gilded Chain

After years of exploring the earth for mineral wealth, Albertan Dave Duncan now plumbs the depths of imagination for a living.

Duncan, a former geologist, makes a living as one of the top fantasy authors. His recently Great Game series, has been one of the most popular installments in the genre in a long time.

Last fall, he embarked on another fantastic quest with the release of The Gilded Chain.

In the novel, Durendal has endured years of training to become one of Chivial's finest swordsmen — the King's Blades. But rather than join the service of the king, Durendal finds himself serving one of the land's lesser noblemen.

When the nobleman dies, Durendal embarks on a quest to find another member of the elite troop. But while his characters may have a purposeful quest, Duncan's stories take a less-than-deliberate approach — at least, at first.

"As far as I can make out, a story begins with a seed of an idea that niggles away at me in off moments," Duncan explained. "I try to water it with other ideas and eventually it either rots away or starts to grow into something worthwhile, which may have no more resemblance to the original than an oak has to an acorn."

More often than not, Duncan's works are literary oaks. They contain large, expansive and firmly rooted stories.

Although there are similar aspects to Duncan's earlier works such as Shadow and the Seventh Sword, in the case of The Gilded Chain, Duncan used a piece of history as the acorn of the novel.

According to Duncan, Chain began with the deathbed repentance of Thomas Cardinal Wolsey, Lord Chancellor of England.

"When Henry VIII's men came to take away his chain of office, the dying rogue said, 'Had I served my God as well as I have served my king . . .' and so on. The scene was very well done in the movie, A Man for All Seasons."

"As far as I can make out, a story begins with a seed of an idea that niggles away at me in off moments."

Gilded Chain's first chapter has an echo of this incident.

"Except in my version, the old chancellor can't be arrested because he has a deadly young swordsman there, sworn to defend him to the death."

He penned the first words of the novel in March 1995 and began making notes about where he wanted the plot to go. Before long, he had completed the prologue.

Photo courtesy of Avon Books

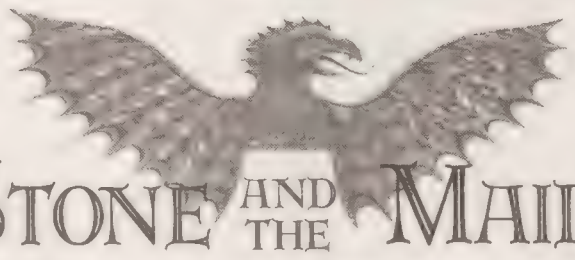
The Gilded Chain began as a stand-alone novel for Dave Duncan, but his editor noted that it would make an ideal opening for another fantasy series . . . luckily for readers, Duncan agreed.

"I needed a break from the book I was working on, and the idea for a story of magically-enhanced swordsmen bodyguards had been niggling at me for several days.," he recalls.

The first draft was completed in two months — a

Continued on page 62

From author Dennis Jones comes the first novel in a spellbinding new trilogy of passion, peril, fantastic creatures and spectacular adventure...



THE STONE AND THE MAIDEN

THE HOUSE OF THE PANDRAGORE

HarperCollins*PublishersLtd*
$29.95 hardcover

Dave Wolverton
Readers taken on strange, humorous trip

A Very Strange Trip is just the latest saga in a long relationwhip between the popular author and the legacy of sciene fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard

Like the protagonist of his latest novel, author Dave Wolverton is on a strange trip.

When I spoke to Wolverton, he was on a cellphone from a mall in Dallas, Texas. The night before, he had been in Toronto as part of a whirlwind tour promoting his latest book, A Very Strange Trip.

The novel is based on an unproduced screenplay by the late L. Ron Hubbard. It is the second novel to be based on a Hubbard screenplay. Last year, Kevin J. Anderson wrote the novelization of Ai! Pedrito!

A Very Strange Trip sends a U.S. soldier to the age of the dinosaurs and a few spots in between

In A Very Strange Trip, Everett Dumphee finds himself arrested for running moonshine in West Virginia. After being found guilty, he's given a choice. He can either spend 10 years in prison or he can enlist in the army for five years. He opts for the latter.

Once in the army, he's selected for the driver's training program on the basis of his supposed past as a moonshiner. On his first assignment, he must drive a specially equipped vehicle from New Jersey to Denver. On board are a number of secret weapons procured from Russia after the fall of the Iron Curtain and among these items is a time machine with the explicit instructions, "Do Not Jar."

The machine, of course, is jarred and Dumphee finds himself bounced throughout time periods as he travels across the country to Denver. Along the way, he picks up three native wives and makes his mark in North American history.

A Very Strange Trip is a compelling and fun read, partly because of the comical elements present in the screenplay, but also because of Wolverton's skill at transforming the work into novel form.

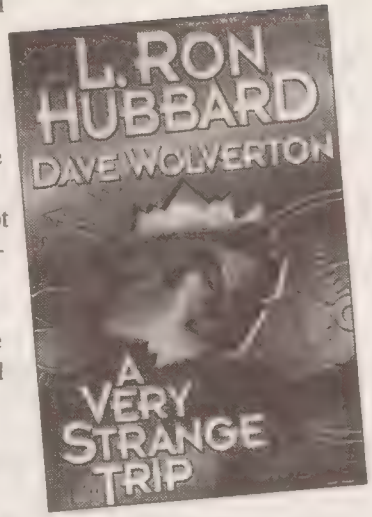
"The challenge in this is that, as a screenplay, you don't get any interior dialogue, so you don't know what the characters are thinking and how they're perceiving the world emotionally. So you have to add that in," Wolverton explained. "The other challenge was that a lot of the humour that was in the script were sight gags and things like that that work well on film, so I had to move away from that because some of the things that work well on film

Photo courtesy of Bridge Publications

Besides his career as an author, Dave Wolverton also serves as a consultant for a Utah-based video game company and has served as a co-ordinating judge for the Writers of the Future contest.

wouldn't work well in a book."

But Wolverton noted that these challenges were balanced out by the fact that he didn't have to create a plot or the characters — although he made Dumphee less of a screwball and more naive than Hubbard originally envisioned.



It also provided him with an opportunity to inject some humour into his work — something that he had been doing slowly in his more recent works such as Beyond The Gate and his Star Wars novels.

"I thought it was a fun comic script and I always liked time travel stories," he said of his attraction to the project.

The project is just the latest in Wolverton's involvement with Hubbard's legacy.

Thirteen years ago, Wolverton took the top prize in the Writers of the Future competition — an initiative Hubbard started to help writers enter the field of speculative fiction.

Since then, he's published 11 novels and dozens of short stories. One, After a Lean Winter, was a Nebula Award finalist.

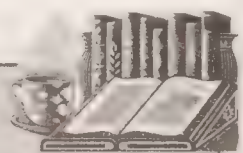
Wolverton has served as a judge for the Writers of the Future competition for nine years and, for the past seven years, has served as an editor of the anthology containing the year's winning entries.

But aside from his involvement with the Writers of the Future contest, part of the attraction of the project for Wolverton was the parallels between the story and his own life.

"Dumphee was a West Virginia moonshiner and my grandfather was a West Virginia moonshiner; he goes off and marries an Indian woman and my grandmother was an Indian woman that my grandfather purchased in 1921," Wolverton explained. "There was some cosmic things like that and it just seemed like a fun project to do."

☆

A Selected Bibliography



1985	**Beyond the Gate**
1994	**The Golden Queen**
1987	**Lords of the Seven the Swarm**
1989	**On My Way to Paradise**
1993	**Path of the Hero**
1991	**Serpent Catch***
1994	**The Courtship of Princess Leia**

*** short story**

In Paperback

AVON & AVON EOS

Child of the River:	Paul McAuley
Code of Conduct	Kristine Smith
The Daughters of Bast:	Sarah Isidore
The Death of the Necromancer:	Martha Wells
Full Tide of Night:	J.R. Dunn
The Game of Words:	David Brin
The Garden of Stone	Victoria Strauss
The Gulded Chain:	Dave Dunca
The Heritage Trilogy:	Ian Douglas
Iris:	William Barton, Michael Capobianco
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Lord of Sunset:	Parke Godwin
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Prophecy:	Sharon Green
Scent of Magic:	Andre Norton
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Tales From the New Republic:	ed. Peter Schweighofer, Craig Carey
The Veiled Web	Catherine Asaro
X-Wing Starfighters of Admar:	Aaron Allston

DAW

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Perseus Spur:	Julian May
Priam's Lens:	Jack L. Chalker
Stars &Stripes Forever:	Harry Harrison
Typhon's Children:	Toni Anzetti
The Witch's Daughter:	R.A. Salvatore

WHITE WOLF

Setite:	Kathleen Ryan
Tzimisce:	Eric Griffen

WIZARDS OF THE COAST

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Baldur's Gate:	Philip Athans
Brothers in Arms:	Margaret Weis, Don Perrin
Dezra's Quest:	Chris Pierson
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End of Cold War pushes author in new direction

Dennis Jones abandons world of espionage for world of maidens and chain mail

The end of the Cold War forced a lot of people to take up new careers.

Among them were authors who concocted spy thrillers — no Cold War, no spies and hence no need for spy novels.

Ottawa-area author Dennis Jones was among the writers who had to look for greener pastures when the Berlin Wall fell.

"I bailed out of the genre when the Cold War was over and I was getting tired of writing spy stories," Jones recalls of the period in the late '80s and early '90s. "I always liked reading science fiction and fantasy so when circumstances conspired against me, they were the natural places to turn to."

Of the two genres, Jones chose fantasy for the new direction his career was about to take.

"I always had an interest in writing a historical novel. And a fantasy novel has many of the same elements but you don't have to worry about the factual details."

This summer, Jones' first foray into fantasy reaches bookstores.

The Stone and the Maiden, published by Avon Books under its Eos imprint, follows the adventures of Mandine Dascaris who must save her land from the Tathars — a barbarian race that is laying waste to the lands of the Ascendency.

Dascaris and Key Mec, a soldier in her army, must find the legendary Signata to defeat the Tathars and their sorcerous leader Erkai. The Signata is enigmatically described as a place that contains all places and a moment that contains all moments.

Jones' first fantasy novel had its conception in a CD he was listening to a few years back.

"I was listening to Laureena McKennit and it brought images into my head and then the plot began to form from there," he said.

Among the images which the music created were a cavalry charge and a young woman lost in the woods. These images became the linchpin for Jones' novel.

Written on spec, the Stone and the Maiden went through five revisions before it was ready for publication.

The first draft took about eight months in 1996 to complete.The book then spent the next two years being revised by Jones and by his informal focus group.

"I gave it to a few friends and they made some suggestions," Jones' recalls.

Their suggestions in one area proved extremely valuable.

Unlike some epic fantasy novels which have a beginning, an end and a dead spot in the middle, The Stone and the Maiden manages to hold the reader throughout the entire course of the adventure.

This is largely due to Jones' previous literary efforts and the input of his friends.

"Many epic fantasy novels have a certain ponderousness, a digression to

them," Jones explained. "This is so the author can stop and look at the scenery.

"Pacing is what I learned from writing spy novels. I wanted to keep the story moving so I wrote the book as a type of fantasy-thriller."

Jones' friends pointed out that the middle portion of the novel "sagged." So he decided to "turn up the temperature a bit."

To carry the reader through the middle of the novel, Jones increased the threat posed to the story's heroes. The end result is a taut fantasy — not something you can usually say about modern-day epics.

With the first book published, Jones is at work on the second installment of the adventures in the lands of the Ascendency.

And a third?

"I plan to stop after three . . . unless I have a good reason to continue."

☆

Recent & Upcoming Releases

The following are books received by Parsec from U.S. publishers or their Canadian distributors since the previous issue of the magazine was distributed. Please note that release dates are subject to change. HC denotes hard cover, TP denotes trade paperback, ✐ denotes that a review appears in the current issue, ▲ denotes recommended. When possible both U.S. and Canadian suggested retail prices are included.

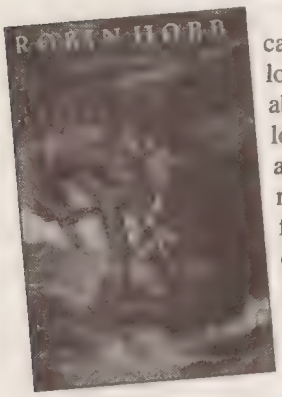
334; Thomas Disch;Vintage Books; TP; $17.95 Cdn.
▲ **999**; Al Sarrantonio ed.; Avon; HC; $27.50 US, $39.50 Cdn.
Ancients of Days; Paul McCauley; Avon Eos; HC; $24 Cdn.
Angel Fire East; Terry Brooks; Del Rey; HC; $25.95 US, $38.95 Cdn.
✐ **The Annunciate**; Severna Park.; Avon Eos; HC; $23 US, $34 Cdn.
Aramaya; Jane Routley;Avon/Eos; TP; $13.50 US, $19.50 Cdn.
Avalon; Stephen R. Lawhead; Avon Eos; HC; $25 US, $37 Cdn
The Black Raven; Katharine Kerrt; Bantam Spectra; TP; $13.95 US,$19.95 Cdn. **November**
Camp Concentration; Thomas Disch;Vintage Books; TP; $17.95 Cdn.
✐ **Crescent City Rhapsody**; Kathleen Ann Goonan; Avon Eos; HC; $23 US, $34 Cdn. **February**
Cthulhu 2000; Jim Turner ed.; Del Rey; TP; $17.95 Cdn.
▲ **Darwin's Radio**; Greg Bear, Del Rey, HC; $24 US, $34 Cdn
Dictionary of Imaginary Places; manguel Alberto Manguel, Gianni Guadlupi; Knopf; HC; $49.95 Cdn. **November**
Drawing of the Dark; Tim Powers.; Del Rey Impact; TP; $11.95 US,, $17.95 Cdn. **November**
End of Days; Dennis Danvers; Avon Eos; HC; $16 US, $24 Cdn.
Ender's Shadow; Orson Scott Card; Tor/H.B. Fenn; HC; $34.95 Cdn.
Far Horizons; Robert Silverberg ed.; Avon Eos; HC; $27.50 US, $37.50 Cdn.
Half Life; Hal Clement; Tor/H.B. Fenn; HC;$23.95 US, $34.95 Cdn. **November**
Household Gods; Judith Tarr and Harry Turtledove; Tor/HB Fenn; HC; $27.95 US, $39.95 Cdn.
▲ **In the Beginning . . .Was the Command Line**; Neal Stephenson.; Avon Eos; TP; $10 US, $14.95 Cdn. **November**
Kaspian Lost; Richard Grant; Spike; HC;$24 US, $35 Cdn.
The Icarus Hunt; Timothy Zahn; Bantam Spectra; HC; $34.95 Cdn.
Lord Demon; Roger Zelazny, Jane Lindskold; Avon Eos; HC; $23 US, $34 Cdn.
Lord of the Fire Land; Dave Duncan; Avon Eos; HC; $23 US, $34 Cdn **October**
The Man Who Fell to Earth; Walter Tevis.; Del Rey Impact; TP; $11 US , $16.50 Cdn. **November**
The Marriage of Sticks;Jonathan Carroll; Tor/H.B. Fenn; HC; $23.95 US, $34.95 Cdn.
Marriage of the Living Dark; David Wingrove; Doubleday; TP; $19.95 Cdn
✐ **The Martians;** Kim Stanley Robinson; Bantam Spectra; HC; $24.99 US, $35.95 Cdn **September**
The Meaning of Star Trek; Thomas Richards; Doubleday Books; TP; $12.95 US, $19.95 Cdn.
Memoranda; Jeffrey Ford.;Avon Eos; TP; $12 US, $18 Cdn. **October**
Midsummer Night's Faery Tale; Wendy Froud. Terry Windling; Knopf; HC; $18 US, $26.50 Cdn. **October**
Millennium Rising; Jane Jensen, Del Rey; HC; $24 US, $37 Cdn. **October**
▲ **Night of the Wolf**; Alice Borchardt; Del Rey; HC; $25 US, $38 Cdn.
Obernewtyn; Isobelle Carmody; Tor/H.B. Fenn; HC;$22.95 US, $32.95 Cdn. **November**
Rhapsody; Elizabeth Hayden; Tor; HC; $24.95 US, $35.95 Cdn.
Return to Mars; Ben Bova; Avon Eos; HC; $37 Cdn.
The Shadow Star; Chris Claremont; Bantam Spectra; HC; $24.95 US,$34.95 Cdn. **November**
▲ **A Signal Shattered**; Eric S. Nylund; Avon Eos; HC; $23 US, $34Cdn
Silverfall: Story of Seven Sisters; Ed Greenwood; Random House; TP; $18.95
▲ **Spine of the World**; R.A. Salvatore; Wizards of the Coast/Random House; HC; $23.99 US, $31.95 Cdn. **September**
Starfire;Charles Sheffield; Bantam Spectra; TP; $13.95 US,$20.95 Cdn. **November**
Star Wars: the Making of Episode I; Laurent Bouzereau, Jody Duncan; Del Rey; TP; $27.95 Cdn.
▲▲ **The Stone and the Maiden**; Dennis Jones; Avon Eos; HC; $23 US, $34 Cdn.
Vector Prime; R.A. Salvatore, Del Rey; HC; $24 US,$24.95 US, $35.95 Cdn. **October**
The Wheel of Fire; Jane Killick; Del Rey/Random House; TP; $14.95 Cdn.
▲ **Wind in the Stone**; Andre Norton; Avon; HC; $23 US, $34 Cdn.
X Marks the Spot, On Location with the X-Files; Louisa Gradnitzer, Todd Pittson.; Arsenal Pulp; TP; $15.95, $18.95 Cdn.
Year's Best Fantasy and Horror; Ellen Datlow, Terri Windling eds.;St. Martin's Griffin; ; SC; $26.99 Cdn.
Year's Science Fiction; Gardener Dozois ed.;St. Martin's Griffin; TP; $26.99 Cdn.

Research key to making fantasy convincing: Hobb

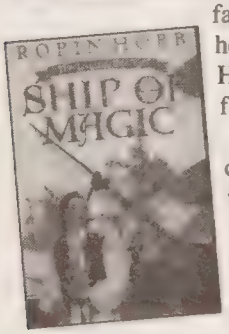
18th- and 19th-century journals helped Mad Ships set sail

Fresh off of her Farseer trilogy, Robin Hobb started another trilogy — The Liveship Traders.

For Hobb, her love of writing predates her attraction to science fiction and fantasy.



"As far back as I can remember, as long as I've been able to read, I've loved fairy tales and folk tales and moved right into fantasy and science fiction," she explained during a stop on a recent signing tour.



While she is a fan of both genres, by her own admission, Hobb's strong suit is fantasy.

"In fantasy, you can get right down to working with archetypes," Hobb says of her attraction to the fantastic. "And right into your wildest . . . well . . . fantasies.

"To set up a world and make literally anything happen, if you have the skills to make it believable, it's a wonderful freedom for a writer."

And she has excelled in this freedom.

Her latest book, Mad Ship, was selected as a main selection for the Science Fiction Book Club.

Mad Ship is the second in Hobb's trilogy. The third installment, Ship of Destiny, is due out in March.

Mad Ship is not for the faint of heart who are looking for a lightweight book to blow through in a couple of nights.

It is an intricate novel which demonstrates the heights fantasy writers can achieve. Mad Ship is a textured work which allows its characters to carry the story forward rather than rely on the staples of fantasy writing such as spells, wizards and wood nymphs.

In the trilogy, the sea-faring traders of Bingtown travel on ships which, because of the wood they're constructed of, are alive.

But while creating your own world offers authors a measure of freedom, there are also challenges involved in the task.

"In the day-to-day details, you have to be absolutely convincing," Hobb explains. "A lot of people don't understand that there is a lot of research that goes into fantasy.

"Because if you don't have the details believable, you're not going to hook the reader enough to make them accept the more fantastic things."

As an example of an author who is always up to the challenge, Hobb points to Stephen King.

King's talents for bringing every-day details, like cereal boxes on the kitchen table and cars acting up at the curb, "paints a day-to-day story, that when he asks you to accept something that is absolutely terrifying and yet fantastic, you unhesitatingly do so, because the rest of it is so compellingly real."

The genesis for Hobb's current seagoing trilogy comes from her time on a variety of ocean vessels with her marine engineer husband.

"Listening to him talk with the men he's worked with, you realize that every ship has its own personality and its own set of traits," she said. "It does seem that ships are alive, that they're more than rivets and wood."

For the Mad Ship and its predecessor, Ship of Magic, Hobb spent a good chunk of time in libraries examining documents and sailors' journals from the 18th and 19th centuries.

"They're absolutely fascinating. The ones that are actually journals of sailors give you a good insight into how they saw things. And they are very different sometimes from our historic perspective."

The journals provided a glimpse into the superstitions and folklore that made up life on the whaling ships that plied the Pacific.

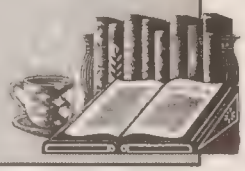
"Sailors were and are a superstitious lot and have their own wonderful fantasies that are associated with ships and living on the sea.

"By and large, they are tellers of tales. There has to be something about people who spend that much time out on the water with only themselves for company that they become wonderful storytellers."

☆

A Selected Bibliography

1995	Assassin's Apprentice
1996	Royal Assassin
1997	Assassin's Quest
1998	Ship of Magic
1999	Mad Ship



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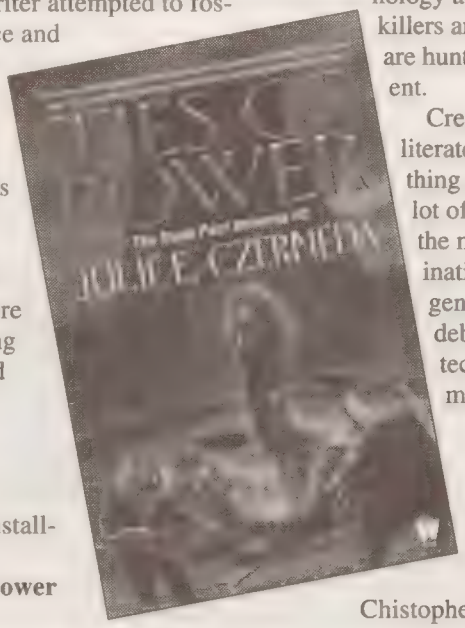
Czerneda work lives up to expectations

Ties of Power marks a strong second entry into Czerneda's Trade Pact series

During her relatively brief career, Julie Czerneda has proven to be a fine editor and a deft handler of fiction. She has not been content to simply write tales for readers of fiction. Through her work on Without Limits, the Canadian writer attempted to foster a love of both science and science fiction among teens. For this effort alone, Czerneda deserves a measure of praise. (See"Author uses science fiction to teach science fact — Parsec, Winter 98/99). But she also has gained a measure of renown for her writing in science fiction — and deservedly so.



Two years after A Thousand Words for a Stranger, Czerneda has offered up the second installment of her Trade Pact Universe with **Ties of Power** (DAW).

In this book, Barac sud Sarc travels to a hellhole far from his home planet to see his race's most powerful telepath, Sira di Sarc. He wants to learn why and by whom his brother was murdered.

Di Sarc had fled from her home after she had discovered the treachery of the Clan — the social-political body which runs things. It is also the group which had been manipulating her and which had objected to her relationship with a human male.

Czerneda's literary strength shines through in Ties of Power.

She is able to provide the reader with well-defined characters and images. More importantly, Czerneda provides a compelling plot which carries the reader page-to-page and world-to-world. And that is the mark of a writer on the top of her game.

Chris Krejgaard

☆☆☆

With the apocalyptic pronouncements attached to the turn of the millennium, Kathleen Ann Goonan's **Crescent City Rhapsody** (Avon Eos) seems a particularly appropriate read.

In the novel, Goonan examines the potential benefits and dangers of nanotechnology.

It is issue-driven science fiction at its best — wrapped around a potboiler of a mystery.

An interstellar pulse cripples the world's communications network. Zeb, an astronomer, discovers that the pulse was actually a message from another planet and must hide from government agents who want to keep the nature of the pulse a secret.

At the same time, a mob boss who was assassinated (almost) is brought back to life with nanotechnology and sets out to find her killers and to protect people who are hunted because they are different.

Crescent City Rhapsody is a literate piece of work — something that cannot be said for a lot of science fiction that has hit the market during recent years. It is also an imaginative tale which affirms the potential of the genre to be thought provoking and to spark debate on the potential implications of current technological and social trends and developments.

Chris Krejgaard

☆☆☆

It's been awhile since I've read one of Chistopher Stasheff's Warlock novels, but I remember enjoying his particular brand of science-fantasy very much. Which is why the latest in his spin-off series, **A Wizard in Midgard** (TOR), was so much fun.

One of the great things about Stasheff's style is its simplicity. Even if you've never read any of his other Warlock or Wizard books, Stasheff can bring you up to date in a few paragraphs on all the essential background details behind why Magnus d'Armand, or Gar Pike as he sometimes calls himself, is on a planet which features giants and dwarves and a culture based on the Vikings — including slavery.

It's a culture Magnus begins monkeywrenching almost as soon as he makes planetfall incognito. An easy and enjoyable read.

Gregg Chamberlain

☆☆☆

As convoluted plotlines go, Severna Park's **The Annunciate** (Avon Eos) neither falls into the morass that so many novels do nor does it achieve status of anything more than a potboiler.

The love triangle-drug addiction-search-for-paradise-save the baby-look-for-the-savior

plot of the book would have been a mess in anyone else's hands. It is a testament, to Park's abilities that such a plot was even readable.

The Annunciate deals with such contemporary issues as drug addiction, the disenfranchisement of some classes of society and the search for truth. It aspires to be a great book.

Sadly, it isn't.

Lars Johansen

☆☆☆

L.E. Modesitt, Jr.'s latest addition to what is now his Columbia alternate-world series, **The Ghost of the Revelator** (Tor), starts out slow but has a roaring finish. Which may be best for newcomers since there's a fair bit of background detail to absorb during the first few chapters that set the scene.

Ex-Spasi agent Johann Eschbach and former French diva Lysette DuBoise are trying to make a new life for themselves as university instructors but their past keeps intruding. In a world where ghosts are real and are a subject for scientific study, Eschbach knows a secret of spectral physics with military potential. When his wife is kidnapped by religious extremists who want his knowledge, the problem haunting Eschbach is how to rescue her without giving in to them.

One of the more entertaining aspects of this alternate-world foray is the political geography. Easy to figure out is Ferdinand's Europe and its neo-Prussian imperialism (who'd have imagined Hitler as a "cultured, charming" ambassador?).

North America's a little more tricky. The United States does not exist. Neither does Canada or Mexico. Columbia is what New Amsterdam might have developed into had Holland stuck with its Dutch colony in America.

To the north is an independent, and sometimes belligerent, Quebec along with the "Canadian states" which may be tied to Columbia. West is the Mormon nation of Deseret, while south lies the New France founded by Maximillian.

Gregg Chamberlain

☆☆☆

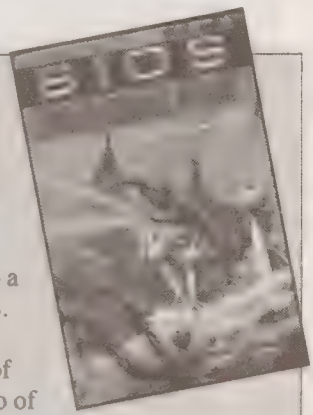
OK, when is a trilogy not a trilogy?

When it's Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars trilogy.

With **The Martians** (Bantam/Spectra) Robinson ties up the loose ends of his earlier trilogy with a series of short stories detailing the lives of residents on the terra-formed colony. The idea behind the vignettes, according to Robinson, is to provide a secret history of the trilogy. With the exception of Exploring Fossil Canyon and Green Mars (which appeared more than a decade ago), the short stories in The Martians are new works which provide added depth to The Mars Trilogy. In fact, they provide the final piece of the literary puzzle.

Lars Johansen

Bios



With his latest work, Robert Charles Wilson serves up a formidible follow-up to Darwinian.

A 100 years from now, man's efforts to colonize the solar system are focused on Isis — a world with earth-like conditions. **Bios** (Tor/H.B. Fenn) follows the efforts of Zoe, a genetically engineered clone who must unlock the secrets of Isis — regardless of the implications — but also of herself and the world that created her.

As always, Wilson provides the reader with a well-textured canvass that offers the reader a glimpse into an imaginative and deftly defined world.

— CK

☆☆☆

The final volume in Kristine Kathryn Rusch's quintet Fey series, **Victory: The Fey** (Bantam/Spectra), plunges headlong toward the conclusion of the war for Blue Isle and sets us up for her Black Throne series which looks at this most recent view of human/faerie relations.

If you haven't read any of the four previous volumes in the series, don't worry, Rusch provides enough background detail to bring anyone up to speed without bogging down the story.

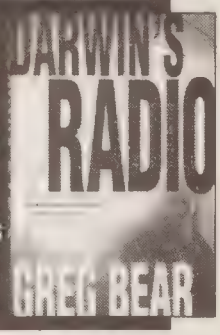
Just keep in mind that Rusch's Fey, to borrow from a line from one of my favourite T.V. shows, are not your bloody little ponces with wings prancing around in the green.

The Fey kick ass and the humans damn near get themselves wiped out when they underestimate their opponents.

Gregg Chamberlain

Also Recommended

Darwin's Radio, Greg Bear
The Spine of the World, R.A. Salvatore
A Signal Shattered, Eric S. Nylund
Night of the Wolf, Alice Borchardt
The Stone and the Maiden, Dennis Jones
Wind in the Stone, Andre Norton



Evil has a new name: it's Bob!

Parsec photo

For Kevin Davies, the creation of the roleplaying games Bob: Lord of Evil and Murphy's World was a logical step.

Like many young people during the early '80s, Davies began his sojourn in gaming by playing Dungeons & Dragons. After a while, he tired of the rigid rules that governed the world created as part of the game.

"Like a lot of players, I wanted to change the rules of the game," he recalls. "The natural step was to put together our own set of rules."

And with those rules came a game.

Over the course of the next few years, Davies went to a number of gaming conventions and conducted some personal market research.

"I asked gamers a lot of questions and then decided what I wanted to go into the product," he explained.

But the final product which was created by Davies and the brainthrust at Peregrine was far different from the one that was formed by the informal market research.

"We had a number of projects on the go. But the market kept changing, and that

Kevin Davies' company, Peregrine Entertainment, spent much of its early days trying to hit gaming market trends. But with Murphy's World and Bob: Lord of Evil, the company found a relatively untapped vein — humour.

White Wolf Game Studio is releasing The Erciyes Fragments for the company's Vampire: The Dark Ages game in November.

The supplement will be penned by noted science fiction author, C.S. Friedman and will chronicle the journey of a young monk who travels to a mysterious monastery and discovers what he believes to be the Book of Nod — the bible of vampiric existence.

The supplement, which carries a suggested retail price of $14.95 (US), includes poetry, fiction and setting material.

☆☆☆

Holistic Design has released a gamemasters screen for its Fading Suns line.

Fading Suns is primarily a game about dramatic conflicts and provides a framework for players to create games from any perspective they desire.

The gamemasters is a sturdy and comprehensive screen with charts to help gamemasters run dramas. It includes all the important Second Edition rulebook charts and tables, along with evocative art to ignite the players imagination and interest.

The suggested retail price is $12.95.

☆☆☆

Starports (for GURPS Traveller) is scheduled for a November release.

From **Steve Jackson Games**, Starports classifies standard starports and describes their facilities, organization and functions.

It includes examples and plans, and guidelines for starport adventures and encounters. It is designed to complement Far Trader and the upcoming Starships supplement.

The suggested retail price for Starports is $20.95 (US).

"Murphy's World filled a vacuum. It captured a style of play that most players were doing anyway."

affected which project we would follow," Davies explained.

The company also had to wait out a shakeout of the gaming industry as it consolidated into a handful of larger distributors came to the forefront as smaller game producers forced saw their access to the marketplace diminish.

Financing and manpower also kept Davies from getting a product to market in time to capitalize on gaming trends. He circumvented this problem by creating a gaming club called the Design Group.

The club was part gamer - part game producer and served as the precursor of Peregrine.

"It was a way to solve the problems and build a creative team," he explained.

The group served as a focus group for the game as it took form. And the form it took was Murphy's World.

The game is a departure from games where players have to be on the constant look out for bloodthirsty trolls.

"It wasn't the first product we'd thought up," Davies noted. "But during the development of the role-playing game, the cycle moved.

"The market went from reality-based to more setting based games."

Murphy's World is a silly place where players you can roleplay lighthearted adventures. It can be used with any existing system of rules — you don't have to generate a new character to use this book. According to Davies, characters from other campaigns can be brought to Murphy's World for adventures, and Characters from Murphy's World can be transported to other campaign worlds.

According to the company's description, Murphy's World is actually the Realm of Faerie, the Land of Myths and Legends, the place of popular folklore and dreams (with a dash of pop culture) — comically twisted, yet maintaining an

internal sense of logic. It operates according to Murphy's Laws. Murphy, by the way, is an intergalactic property developer.

"Murphy's World filled a vacuum. It captured a style of play that most players were doing anyway."

Since the advent of Murphy's World, members of the Design Group moved on to other projects. Davies points out that most of the people involved in the project went on to produce their own games.

With the popularity of Murphy's World and the style of play it embodies, Peregrine has unveiled a companion game, Bob Lord of Evil, which follows in the same humourous footprints.

The game uses the same setting as Murphy's World, but utilizes floor tiles as gamemasters and players establish areas to venture in. The supplement had been two years in the making — a process that was protracted by a dearth of available writers.

But even with such a manpower problem and two games on the market, Davies and Peregrine have a number of games in various stages of development.

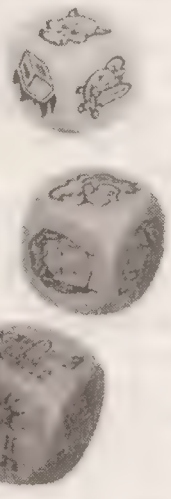
According to Davies, the next game will be another departure for the company and its first two games.

Nanogenesis will be a techno-thriller which will incorporate elements of cyberpunk, science fiction and conspiracy theories.

☆

Canadian games offer mixed bag

GAMING NOTES



By
JUSTIN MOHAREB

I'd like to start off this column with a couple things.

First off, I'd like to start with a rousing rendition of O' Canada, since this is a column dedicated to Canadian roleplaying game companies.

I'd like to, but print has oh so many limitations.

The second thing I'd like to do is ask if **ANYONE** has any way to obtain a copy of either of these sourcebooks, Lone Star for Shadowrun or To Serve & Protect for Cyberpunk, let me know.

It's depressing how hard it is to find old sourcebooks.

Now, then. Onto the Canadiana!

Murphy's World:

Murphy's World, from Peregrine Entertainment, is easily the most Canadian of the games I've looked at. This game, while set on another world (actually the mythic Arcadia) has tonnes of Canuck references within it. OK, mostly Toronto references (but that's the part that counts). Maps refer to mystic lands like Scarberia & Etobicola, and a vast tract of water called the Tee Tee Sea.

Heh?

The fact it's an interesting game setting which allows you to mix characters from different genres (or just give your own characters a nice change) only helps. The sequel (Bob, Lord of Evil) isn't as strong and has a few jokes you'd hope they'd skip, but both of them are worth a look see.

Jovian Chronicles:

JC is the second SF rpg from Dream Pod 9.

In this game, pcs live & adventure in our solar system. It's a relatively hard science RPG, with no artificial gravity or FTL travel.

JC uses the anthropomorphic robot style that DP9 used in Heavy Gear, along with their signature Silhouette system.

The primary PC breeding ground is Jupiter (hence, Jovian Chronicles), but games can be run from Mercury to Earth across the asteroid belt to Big Red and beyond.

JC is a great SF game, and everyone from gearheads to space operatics will like it. There's intrigue and conflict galore, from economic battles to the more martial brand of disagreements.

Xenoforce:

Xenoforce is a game about alien invaders, a fairly bustling genre in recent years.

Unfortunately, it's not the best game to come out in that genre; it's not hard to say that when the genre includes Delta Green and Conspiracy X, but Xenoforce doesn't really come close.

The skill system, for example, is stunted (it would likely work for developing characters for Mission Impossible: The RPG, but is pretty much useless for developing really diverse characters), while the combat system seems somewhat over done.

The introductory comic even has a character with psionics, but no psi rules are included.

Of course, with a good setting, these problems could be forgiven. No such luck.

The game's villains, annoyingly generic evil aliens, are given a half page each and their methods and motivations are thinly sketched out, if not totally ignored.

There's even a section on spending experience, even though no guidelines exist for the distribution of experience.

Xenoforce just feels half-finished. It even has rules for having PCs budget their expenditures, which is something that's slowed more than one rpg to a crawl (Shadowrun can easily become "Home Shopping Channel, 2060").

Ten years ago, I might not have groused at the game that much, but today its mustard-cutting ability is low.

Big Eyes, Small Mouth:

I'm not a huge anime fan. Not that I'll gnaw my way out of a theatre to avoid it, I just won't likely go into the theatre to see it. So, you'll likely be surprised to hear me say that I really like Big Eyes, Small Mouth from Guardians of Order. BESM is a very simple game designed to replicate anime shows and movies.

It does that admirably, but

Continued on page 62

Duncan

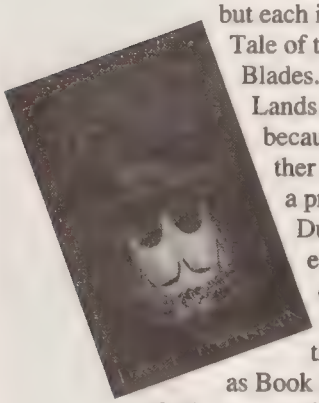
record for him — and then went through a series of rewrites.

But because Duncan was in the midst of The Great Game series, The Gilded Chain had to wait until the series was published.

But in the meantime, Duncan wrote Daughter of Troy (in his Sarah B. Franklin persona), as well as book two of The King's Blade, Lord of the Fire Lands — the follow up to Gilded Chain.

"Gilded Chain was written as a stand-alone. It was my editor at Avon, who suggested that it would make a good series opener," he said. "Of course, I agreed.

"The series is an unusual one. The volumes will not be numbered, but each is subtitled, A Tale of the King's Blades. I call Fire Lands a paraquel, because it is neither a sequel nor a prequel," Duncan explained. "It covers much the same time interval as Book One, but tells of other events from other points of view.



The draft of the third installment, Sky of Swords has already been completed.

The series will also spinoff with a number of books geared for the young adult market.

"I'd never tried the genre, but I accepted, because flattery will get you everywhere."

The first book, Sir Stalwart, is scheduled for this fall.

Beyond that? Duncan still has a few acorns to plant.

☆

Ackerman

classics. Each issue was filled with articles that conveyed the affection Ackerman had for the genres.

But in the end, Ackerman said leaving the magazine wasn't all that difficult.

"I was driving to my birthday party and I suffered a heart attack," he recalls, adding that Warren believed that his constant after-deadline changes played a factor in the attack.

Between the health scare and the effect of inflation on his paycheque from Warren Publishing, Ackerman decided it was time to leave the business.

He did return briefly when Famous Monsters was revived by another publisher in the early '90s. But it was a relationship that didn't last.

"I didn't like the direction they were taking," he said of the split. "So I divorced myself from the magazine."

The same can be said of the recent crop of horror and science fiction movies. Even though he admires the special effects wizardry, "there are very few movies nowadays that I feel are going to become classics in the nature of The Day the Earth Stood Still or It Came From Outer Space.

"Most of it goes in one eye and out the other."

The major factor, Ackerman says, is the phenomena of making movies by committee with and eye toward the profit margin. "We don't have people who are in it with their heart and soul."

But such criticism could never be levelled at horror's grand master, who is less than two decades from becoming horror's George Burns..

Ackerman, sporting such legendary icons as Dracula's ring, still manages to attend about 20 conventions a year in an effort to foster the same affection for classic horror and science fiction that he has experienced during the past 70 or so years..

☆

Mohareb on Gaming

it also has a great deal of flexibility to it.

To be deadly honest, after flipping through the rules the first time, I wasn't incredibly impressed. After recently looking over BESM and its first companion book Big Robots, Cool Starships, I've changed my mind.

What I'm contemplating is using BESM to play a Babylon 5 RPG. With a system as flexible as BESM, simulating that world's SF setting, and keeping a fast action pace that allows for good role-playing would be easy.

Providence:

Id Creative's Providence RPG is a superhero/fantasy RPG. The basic game is two books, a rules book & a world book.

I like the world, but was having problems with it until I had a chance to have a few things explained to me by the designer (for those of you in on the game, it had to do with Troupials & castes).

The world of Providence is quite sweet. It's an underground hollow earth kinda thingy, where pretty much every creature/person is winged. Society is organized into castes according to what kind of wings a character has. The world is rife with opportunities for adventure that take advantage of the blending of genres.

The rules combine the feel of Champions powers and skills with the zero base of such games as the Silhouette system (of course, being a superhero game it has a human minimum of — three, and a maximum in the sixties). The rulebook could have been improved with more world info in it, as the creative system isn't quite different enough to sustain interest on its own.

There you have it. A handful of games from across the country (well, three provinces, at least), nothing in common between them but the country of origin, and the fact they make me wish I had more gaming time.

Until next issue, when I'll be looking at some of the big games of the summer season, don't let Addled Geeks get you down.

❑ Justin Mohareb has an idea for an online-based game where the players are winged superheroes on another planet fighting alien invasions in robotic battlesuits. Serious offers only.

Program

SPACE
THE IMAGINATION STATION

Eastern Time	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	Pacific Time
6:00am	Highlander					Space News.	Canadian	3:00am
6:30am.						Serials	Document.	3:30am
7:00am.	Ray Bradbury							4.00 am
7:30am.	Dr. Who							4 30am
8:00am.	Quantum Leap					Alien	Capt. Power	5.00am
8:30am.						Nation	Elec. Playgrd	5:30am
9:00am.	War of the Worlds					Space Precinct		6:00am
9:30am								6:30am
10am	Star Trek					Star Trek		7:00am
10:30am								7:30am
11:00am	Highlanders					Alien	Capt. Power	8 00am
11:30am						Nation	Elec. Playgrd	8.30a m
Noon	Ray Bradbury							9:00am
12:30pm	Weird Science							9 30am
1:00pm	Alfred Hitchcock Presents					Green Hornet	Twilight Zone	10 00am
1:30pm	Batman					Twilight Zone	Serials	10 30am
2:00pm	Alien	Nowhere	American	Dark	Space Above	Movie	Movie	11:00am
2:30pm	Nationj	Man	Gothic	Skies	and Beyond			11 30am
3:00pm	Babylon 5							noon
3:30pm								12 30pm
4:00pm	Star Trek					Space Above	Space	1:00pm
4:30pm						And Beyond	Specials	1.30pm
5:00pm	Quantum Leap					The	Space	2 00pm
5:30pm						Crow	Specials	2 30am
6:00pm	Highlander					Sliders	Cruel	3 00pm
6:30pm							Earth	3:30pm
7:00pm	Babylon 5					Inv. America	Earth	4:00pm
7:30pm						Walkin aft. Midn	Final Conflict	4 30pm
8:00pm	The	Sliders	Sliders	Sliders	Sliders	Relic	Movie	5:00pm
8 30pm	Raven					Hunter		5.30pm
9:00pm	Lexx	Cruel	First	Angel	Dead Man's	Movie		6:00pm
9:30pm		Earth	Wave		Gun			6 30pm
10:00pm	Star Trek: Deep Space Nine						movie	7:00pm
10:30pm								7:30pm
11:00pm	X-Files					Movie		8 00pm
11:30pm								8:30pm
midnight	Movie	Movie	Movie	Movie	Perversions of Sc.		Beauty and the Beast	9:00pm
12:30am					Movie			9:30pm
1:00am						Perversions of Sc.		10:00pm
1:30am						Movie		10:30pm
2:00am	X-Files						Paranormal prog.	11:00pm
2:30am					X-Files			11:30pm
3:00am	Babylon 5							midnight
3:30am					Babylon 5	Nowhere Man		12:30am
4:00am	Deep Space Nine							1:00am
4:30am					Deep Space Nine	VR5		1:30am
5:00am	Twilight Zone							2:00am
5:30am	Prisoners of Gravity				T. Zone	Prisoners of Gravity		2:30am

Highlights

Earth: Final Conflict
The third season of Gene Roddenberry's legacy arrives on Space.
Sundays at 7 p.m.

Angel
Los Angeles is the locale for a fallen vampire who's out to save a few souls
Thursdays at 9 p.m.

First Wave
Aliens are infiltrating the human population as a prelude to an invasion
Wednesdays at 9 p.m.

Relic Hunter
Tia Carrere uses knowledge of history and martial arts to solve mysteries
Saturdays at 8 p.m.

Can't get Space in your area? Call your cable company

NEXT ISSUE: bellying up to the Spacebar

JANUARY 7-8, 2000

Rustycon 17: The Everett Holiday Inn, Seattle, WA. Scheduled guests: Michael Stackpole, Bear Brown, Jon Gustafson. Registration: $40.00 until Dec. 1, $50.00 for the full weekend, $20.00 Friday only, $25.00 Saturday only, $25.00 Saturday Sunday at the door. Information: P.O. Box 84291 Seattle, WA. 98124-5591

FEBRUARY 5

Cabin Fever Y2K: Place Louis Riel Hotel, Winnipeg, Man. Scheduled Guest: TBA.Registration: N/A;

Otaku Anime
Club of Concordia University
bi-weekly showings of
Japanese animation
for info:
otaku@alcor.concordia.ca

Information: crazydav@pangea.ca

FEBRUARY 18-20

Ad Astra: Best Western Carlton Primrose, 111 Carlton St., Toronto, Ont. Scheduled guests: Nancy Kress & Charles Sheffield. Registration: $40 until Jan. 15, $45 at the door. Information: P.O. Box 2000, Station A, Toronto, Ont., M5W 1X9.

FEBRUARY 24-27

Fanime 2K: Santa Clara Westin Hotel, Santa Clara, Ca. Scheduled guests: unannounced. Registration: $30. Information: P.O. Box 8068, San Jose, CA 9155-8068 or www.fanime.com

MARCH 24-26

Lunacon 2000: Rye Town Hilton, Rye Brook, New York. Scheduled guests: George Alec Effinger, Stu Shiffman,Barbara Hambly. Registration: $36 by Feb. 25, $45 at the door Information: PO Box 3566 NY, NY 10008-3566 or lunacon@lunacon.org

NOVEMBER 20-21

Ape-o-thon 99: Cinéma Impérial, 1430 Bleury. metro Place des Arts, Montreal, QC. Featuring all five Planet of the Apes movies shown from new 35mm prints and Dolby Surround sound. Memorabilia display, make-up demonstrations. Cost is $18 at the door.

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APRIL 20-24

Swan con: The Ascot Inn, 1 Epsom Avenue, Ascot, Western Australia. Scheduled guests: Connie Willis, Garth Nix, Damien Broderick. Registration: full membership $70, supporting membership $20. Information: GPO Box G429, Perth, 6892.

APRIL 21-23

BALTICON 34: Baltimore Omni Inner Harbor Hotel. Scheduled Guests: Octavia Butler Wendy Pini, Richard Pini: Registration: until Dec. 31 $35, until March 31 $40, at the door $45. Information: P,O, Box 686, Baltimore, MD 21203-0686, bsfs@balticon.org, www.balticon.org

APRIL 28-30

ORION CON 3: Day's Inn, 30 Carlton Street, Toronto, Ont. Wargame convention; Information:www.rigelgroup.org

MAY 19-21

Keycon 17: Hote; TBA- Winnipeg, Man. Scheduled guests:Michael Sheard, Igor Kordey. Registration: $30 until Dec. 31, $40 until April 30, $50 at the door. Information: (206) 668-3631 or P.O. Box 3128, Winnipeg, MB. R3C 4E6.

JUNE 16-18

AnimeNorth: Ramada Airport East, Toronto, Ont. Scheduled guests:TBA. Registration:$20 until Jan.1, $25 until May 1. $35 at the door. Information: infor@animenorth.com or www.animenorth.com

JULY 6-8

Atlanticon: Hotel TBA, Charlottetown, PEI. Scheduled guests: TBA. Registration: U/A Information: 131 Water St. Suite 1, Charlottetown, PEI. or graphcom@graphcom.pe.ca

JULY 7-9

A Distant Shore II — 11th Annual Beauty and the Beast Convention: Hilton Burbank Airport, Burbank, CA. Scheduled guests: TBA. Registration: until Nov. 30 $110 (US), until April 30 $120 (US) at the door $130 (US). Information: Carousels and Caverns Community. PO Box 1851, Studio City, CA 91614, LA2K@aol.com or http://members.aol.com//la2k/la2khome.html

Got a con? Then let us know about it . . . parsec@isys.ca

AUGUST 31-SEPTEMBER 4

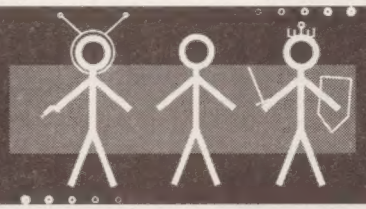
CHICON 2000 — World Science Fiction Convention: Hyatt Regency Chicago, Ill. Scheduled guests:Ben Bova, Jim Baen, Bob Eggleton, Harry Turtledove. Registration: Members Attending $135 US, Supporting $40 US. Information: PO Box 642057, Chicago, IL, 60664, chi2000@chicon.org or http://www.chicon.org/

OCTOBER 26-29

26th World Fantasy Convention: Omni Bayfront Hotel, Corpus Christi, TX. Scheduled guests: K.W. Jeter, John Crowley. Registration NA. Information: PO Box 27277, Austin, TX 78755, fduartejr@aol.com.

AdAstra2000

FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION



February 18,19 & 20

Guests of Honour

Writer Guest of Honour - Nancy Kress
Writer Guest of Honour - Charles de Lint
Writer Guest of Honour - Christopher Stasheff
Editor Guest of Honour - Scott Edelman
Fan Guests of Honour - Lloyd & Yvonne Penney

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Our Sources

These are the people we turn to for information about comic books in Canada. If you have a question or are looking for a hard-to-find back issue, give them a call.

NOVA SCOTIA

Kevin Sauder
Mirror Universe Cards, Comics & Games
79 Alderney Dr.
Dartmouth, B2Y 2N7
(902) 466-8884

Richard Sturk
Webslingers
Halifax Shopping Centre
Halifax B3C 2H8
(902) 455-4949

NEW BRUNSWICK

Derek Nichols
Strange Adventures Comic Books
384 Queen St.
Fredericton, E3B 1B2
(506) 450-3759

Dino
Halley's Comics
25 Charlotte St.
Saint John,
(506) 693-4835

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Jeff Smith
The Comic Hunter
173 Queen St.
Charlottetown, C1A 4B4
(902) 566-2926

QUEBEC

Ace Lopes
Empire Comics
1221 Crescent St.
Montreal, H3G 2B1
(514) 871-1402

ONTARIO

Jody Keebler
Big B Comics
1045 James St.
Hamilton, L8K 1B4
(905) 318-9636

Debbie & Gordon Frew
Triple Play Cards and Comics
18025 Yonge St.
Newmarket, L8Y 8C9
(905) 853-2273

Brad Hayes
Comics North
106 Elm St.
Sudbury, P3C 1T5
(705) 674-1015

Stephanie Hunter
Silver Snail
367 Queen St. W.
2374 Yonge St.
391 Bank St.
Toronto
(416) 593-0889

MANITOBA

Darren Thomas,
Will Sylvester
Comic Cave
1104 Corydon Ave
Winnipeg,
(204) 284-2210

SASKATCHEWAN

Pat Thompson
8th street Books & Comics
1010 8th Street East
Saskatoon, S7H 0R9
(306) 343-6624

Gerry Macdonald
Phoenix Comics &Books
2806 Dewdney Ave.
Regina S4T 0X7
(306) 757-9091

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Gerald Garcia
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Vancouver, V6Z 1M5
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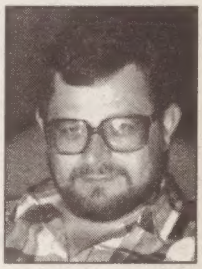
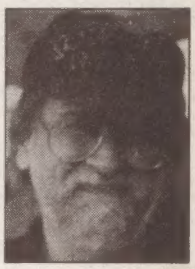
Nanaimo, V9S 1G4
(250) 741-0101

Who's Who

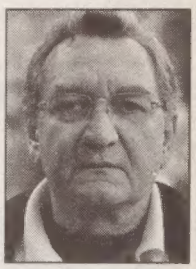
Jake P. van der Merwe was born and bred in South Africa, Jake moved to Vancouver Island in the spring of 1997. He is employed by British Columbia government as a labour relations officer. While still in South Africa, six of Jakeís tales were published in two languages. An Afrikaans magazine, Sarie, published two of his romantic short stories. Four of his horror stories (which he wrote under the pseudonym "James Lakefield") appeared in the South African magazine Bunny Girl: Thy Neighbourís Wife, The Return, Hitchbitch and a slightly different version of Ratbabies. **Ratbabies** is Jake's first published work in North America. He lives in Nanaimo with his wife and three children.



Jim Erkiletian has been a taxi driver, logger, environmentalist, teacher, student, guide, servant and elf, among other occupations. He holds degrees in anthropology, economics and education, and lives on an island in the beautiful Salish Sea. He likes dogs, tall tales and creative imaging, doesn't smoke tobacco and runs Dugout Design which makes prototype hand-carved musical instruments. He plays banjo with the reggae-bluegrass fusion group, SOULSTICE.



David Shtogryn lives in Scarborough (affectionately known as Scarberia), Ont., with his wife and a powder puff German Shepherd called Rambo (honest). He has had more than 30 stories published in a wide variety of magazines and genres, science fiction, fantasy, horror and mainstream. Dave's past contributions have appeared in Northern Frights #3, Parsec (three times), Shadow Feast, Mindmares, Eternity Magazine, Indigenous Fiction, Northern Fusion, Rage Machines Web Zine, Star**Anthology #2, Xizquil #15, Crossroads, Gothic Light, Renovated Lighthouse Magazine and their supplement.



Marilyn Thomas is the mother of three autonomous offspring and two gorgeous granddaughters. She lives alone except for the many worlds filled with characters. She loves all things to do with the universe and longs to be out there among the stars. She has designed the propulsion system for that trek and will take Spike, Rex and Blackie as companions (the spiders that keep her keyboard clean and applaud her efforts) as soon as she finds someone to help her build it.

Larry Desousa is usually Parsec's resident purveyor of comic hilarity. This issue Larry shows he can do serious art too with his illustration for **Dead Flowers**.

Terry Pallot is best known on his work as on comic book versions of Star Trek: Deep Space Nine. His illustration for **Ratbaies** is the latest in a long line of contributions to Parsec.

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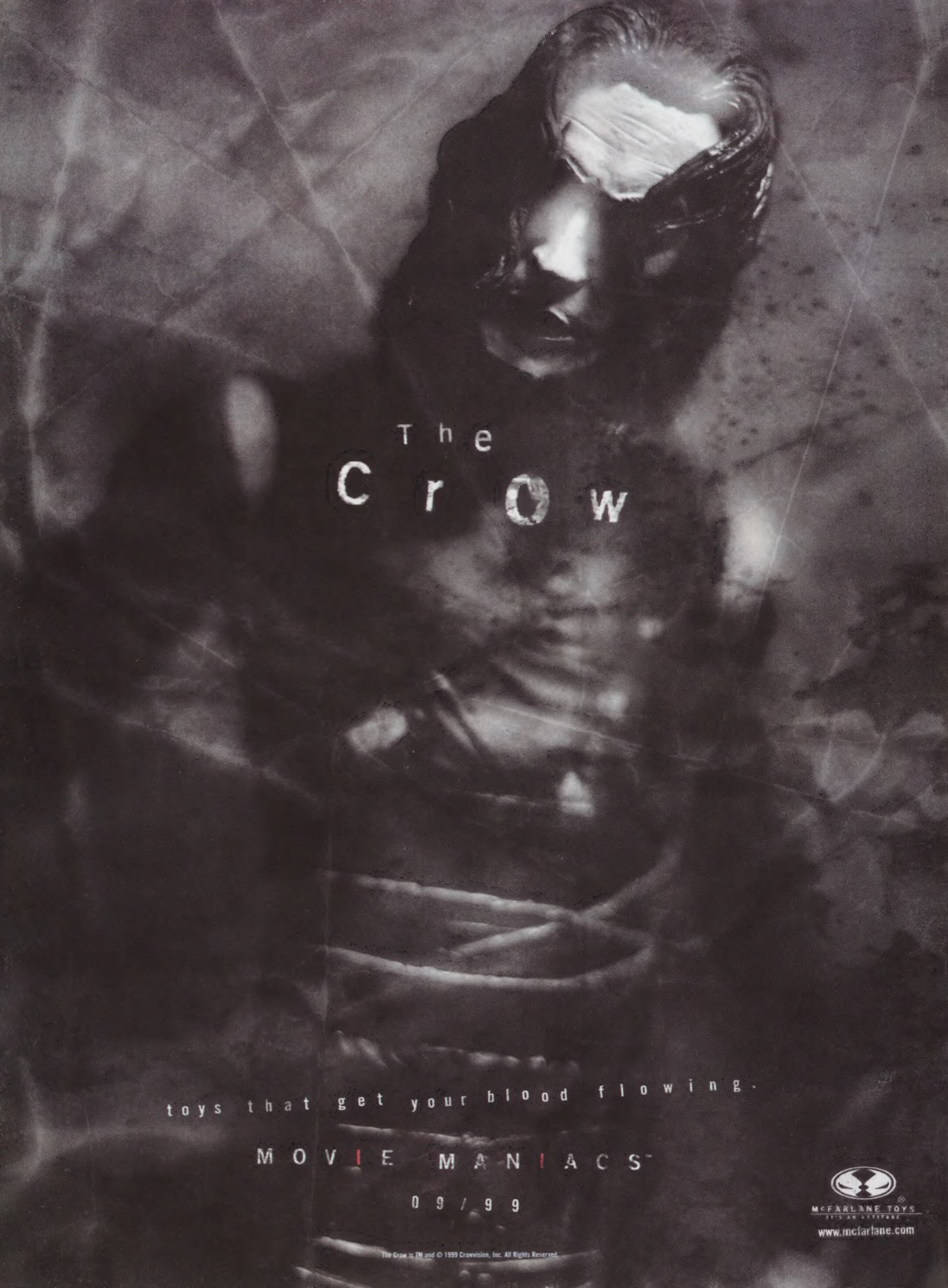

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